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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

GET BETTER AT

CONCEPT ART

Legendary artist **Sparth** shares his unmissable rendering techniques

+ PRO ADVICE FROM...

CHRISTIAN ALZMANN

ALEX JAY BRADY

DONGLU YU

BEN MAURO

IAN MCQUE

FENG ZHU

AND MORE

EXCLUSIVE!

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97 MINUTES OF PRO VIDEO TUITION

PLUS
SPARTH'S
BRUSH SET!

GENERATE IDEAS TODAY

Quickly visualise original shapes with 3D tools

ALSO!



HOW TO BE A CONCEPT ARTIST

Top industry pros discuss their winning strategies for success



SHADING TECHNIQUES

Upgrade your pencil shading with Timothy Von Rueden



CREATE A DREAM WORLD

Build virtual reality scenes in Dreams on PlayStation 4



COLIE WERTZ SKETCHBOOK

From scribbles on a Post-it note to blockbuster film concept art

FUTURE

ISSUE 179



CREATED IN

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Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



Let's leap straight into the awesomeness of this issue: SPARTH! Sparth! Sparth! Who said Sparth? Me! This legendary artist is an inspiration and a master and I'm very proud that his cover and workshop (see page 64) takes centre stage of our concept art issue.

I'm also a long-time fan of Donglu Yu (Donglu Yu! DONGLU Y... okay, I'll stop this), not only for her art, but also in how she's giving back to the art community by mentoring students. It was also interesting to hear how her training in Chinese calligraphy and its no-room-for-error precision would help inform her brush stroke decisions in concept art. She's a true marvel – find out more in our interview on page 34.

In our news feature we chatted with a group of very successful concept artists to discuss what they think is a winning combination of skills to become a master in the field. What do concept artists even do all day? It might not be what you think. See page 18 for more insight.

Let us know what you think of this issue, or ImagineFX in general at the email address below.

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
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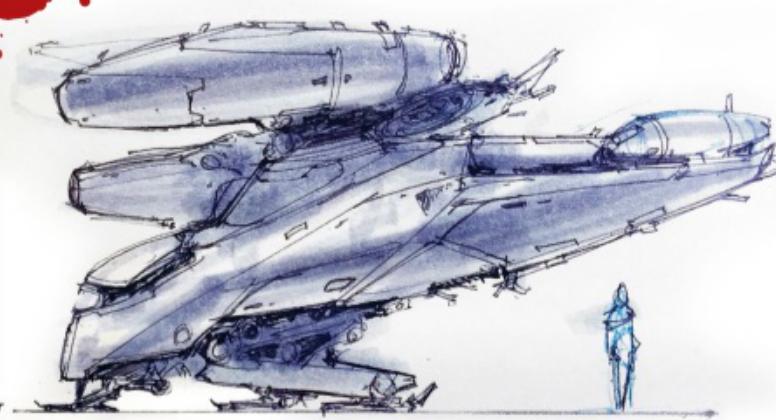


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Turn to page 81...

EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...

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Going postal

I loved finding out that Colie Wertz starts some of his glorious sketches on a Post-it note!

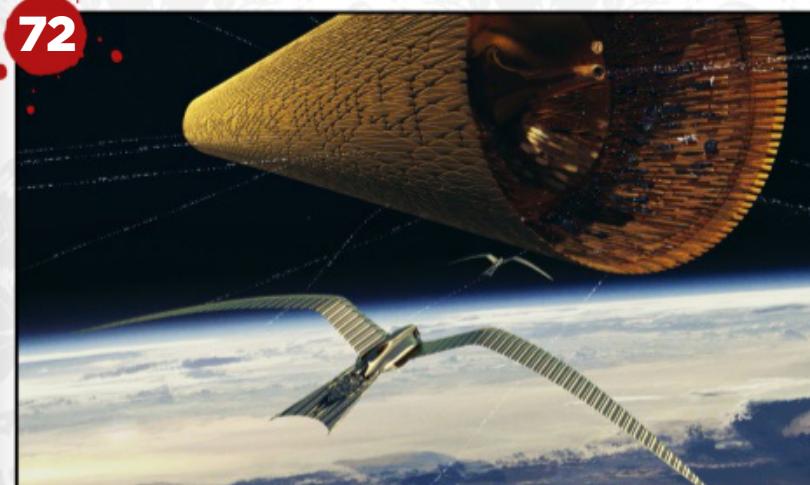
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Start your engines

How Ian McQue's childhood home became the inspiration for his most famous work.

72



Blank page begone!

Do you stare at a blank screen waiting for the ideas to come? Alex Jay Brady has just the thing...

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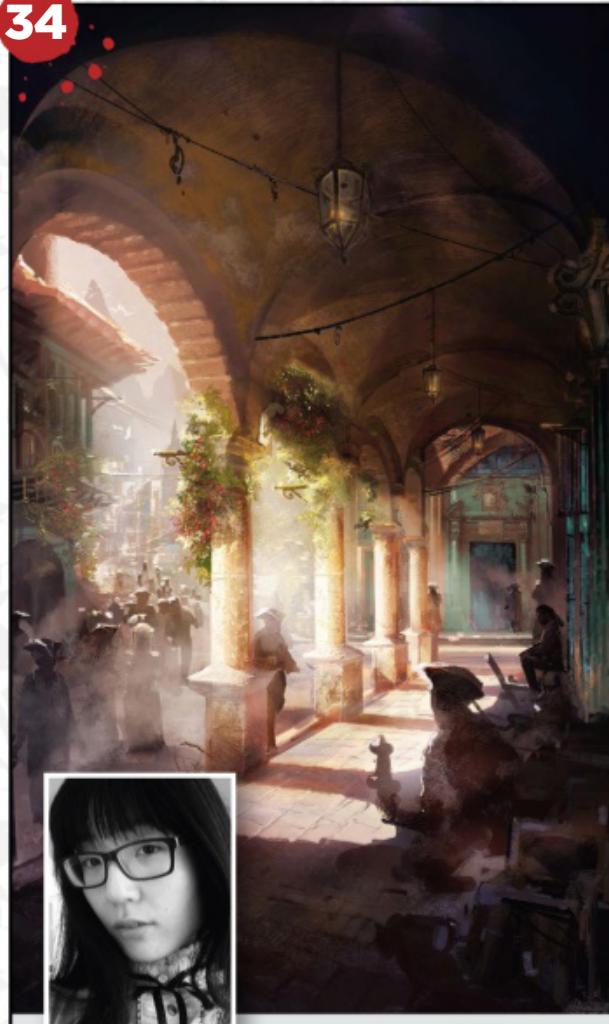
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Artist Portfolio **DONGLU YU**

"Creating personal artwork is a meditative process for me"

Mindfulness, the Donglu way

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Artist Portfolio **IAN MCQUE**

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64 Become a better concept artist

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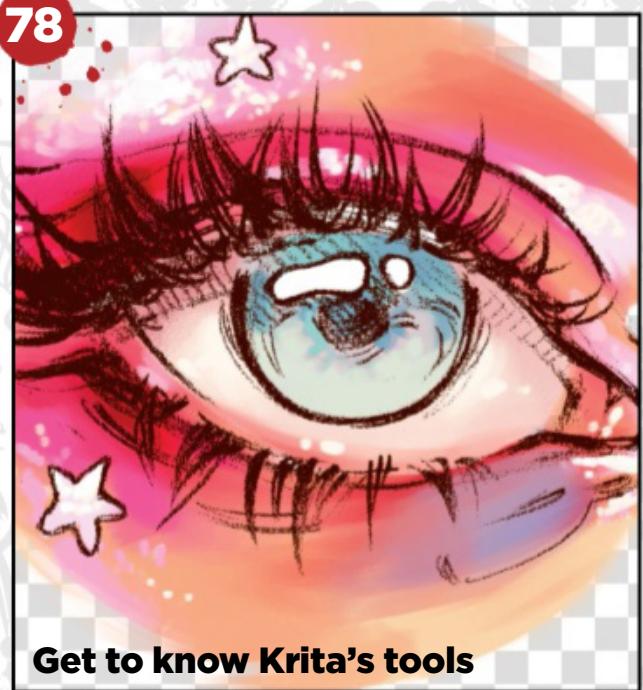
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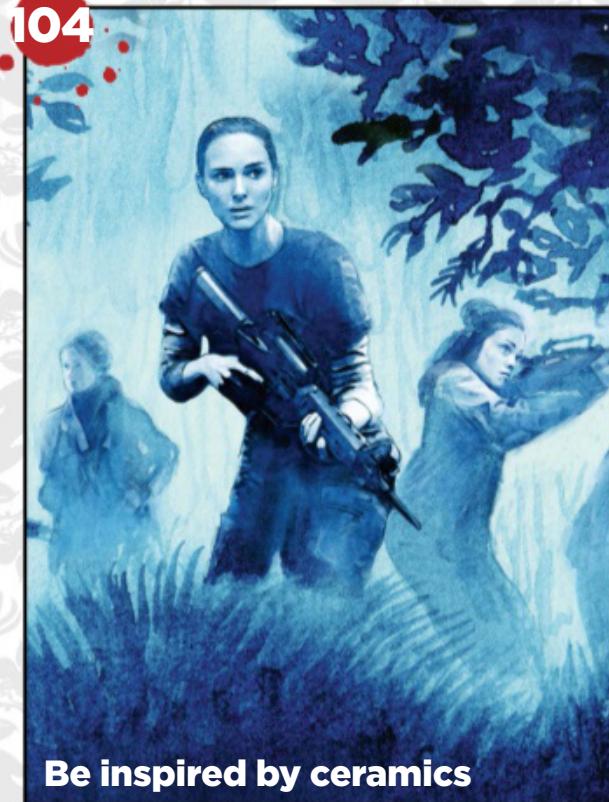
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Be inspired by ceramics

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Resources

Getting hold of this issue's video resources is quick and easy. Just visit <https://ifxm.ag/concept179art>

WORKSHOP VIDEOS



Build a wizard's house in virtual reality

Watch Martin Nebelong get constructive in the PS4 VR game Dreams. See page 82 for more.



Create concepts by melting and recrystallising 3D shapes

See Alex Jay Brady kick-start her ideas process using 3ds Max. The workshop is on page 72.



Take your artistic cues from Delft Blue earthenware

Anna Sokolova creates watercolour art for Netflix. Follow her workshop on page 104.

PLUS SPARTH'S BRUSH SET



Check out 10 custom brushes that the concept artist created for his workshop on page 64.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

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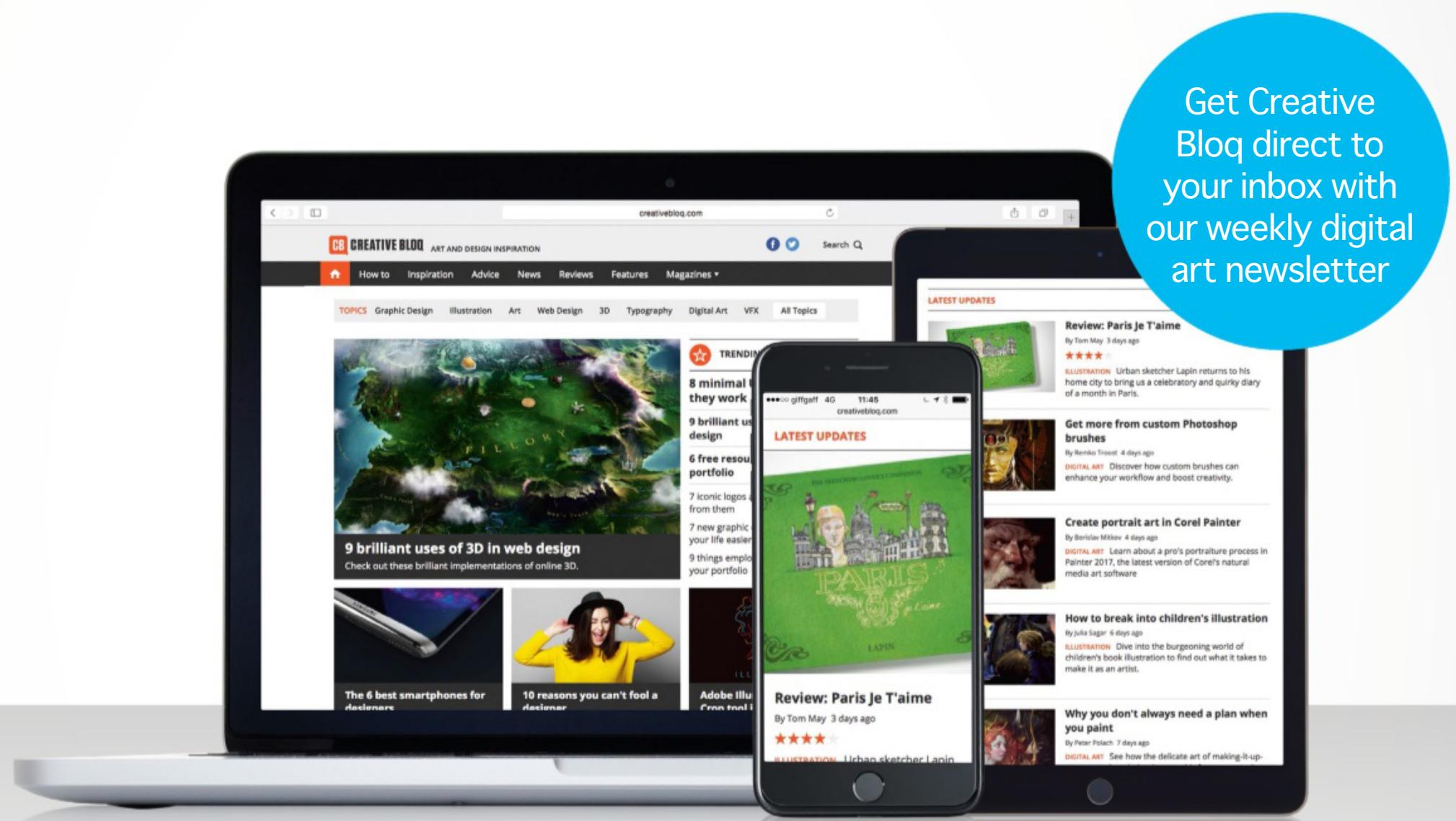
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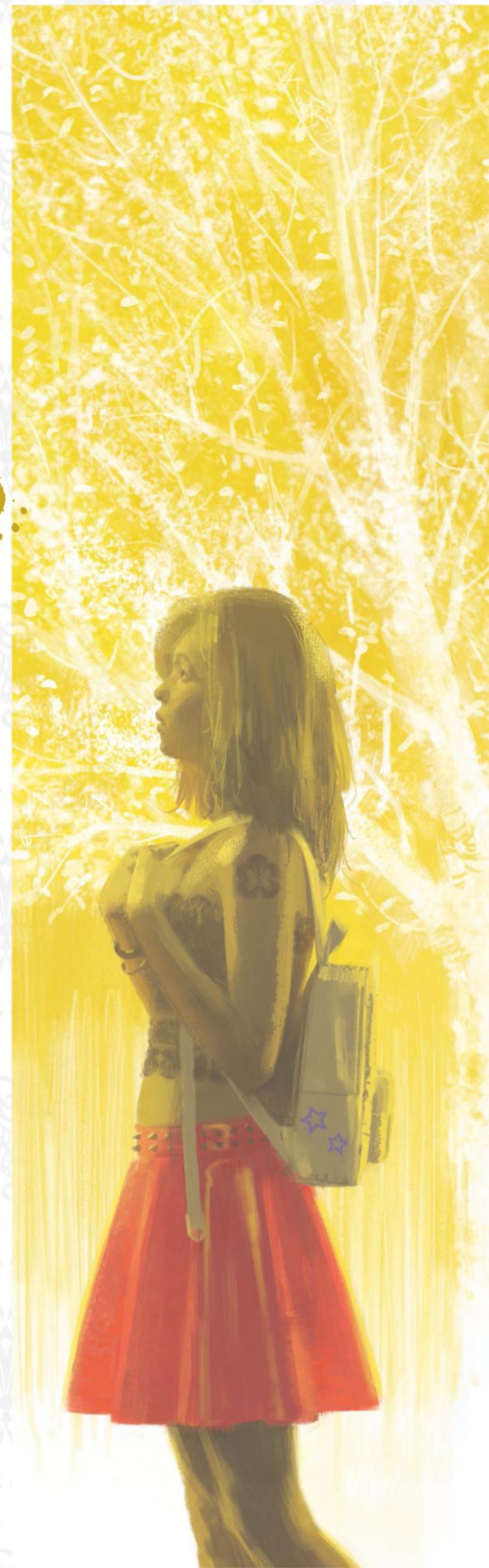
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Yihyoung Li

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.yihyoungli.com

The Taiwanese-American artist works in tabletop and toy product illustration, and is particularly interested in exploring queer identity, dreams, belonging, repression and depression through a fantasy lens.





2



3

1 HOPE

"When I feel down, I begin to catastrophise. Dark clouds loom on my mind's horizon: 'I'm bad, I'm a failure, I'm worthless.' Then I remind myself that I'm only going through a moment. I try to be hopeful, despite not feeling hopeful at all."

2 LAUREL TREE

"Humans are turning into trees. For some, the transformation happens over years; for others, the process takes just a few weeks. Would I be okay with drifting into unconsciousness, resigning myself to this fate? Or am I wanting more?"

3 DOWN UPSIDE

"The answer was in front of me. The remedy to my depression is community. For over a year, 10+ hours a day, I was glued to my computer, addicted to Guild Wars 2. Through my avatar, I lived in a world of bliss. But my other self suffered."



EEPMON

LOCATION: Canada **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.eepmon.com

EEPMON, also known as Eric Chan, is a digital artist/coder and design consultant. He splits his time between New York, Tokyo, Shanghai and Ottawa. He loves Japanese cuisine and aims to live a life of simplicity.

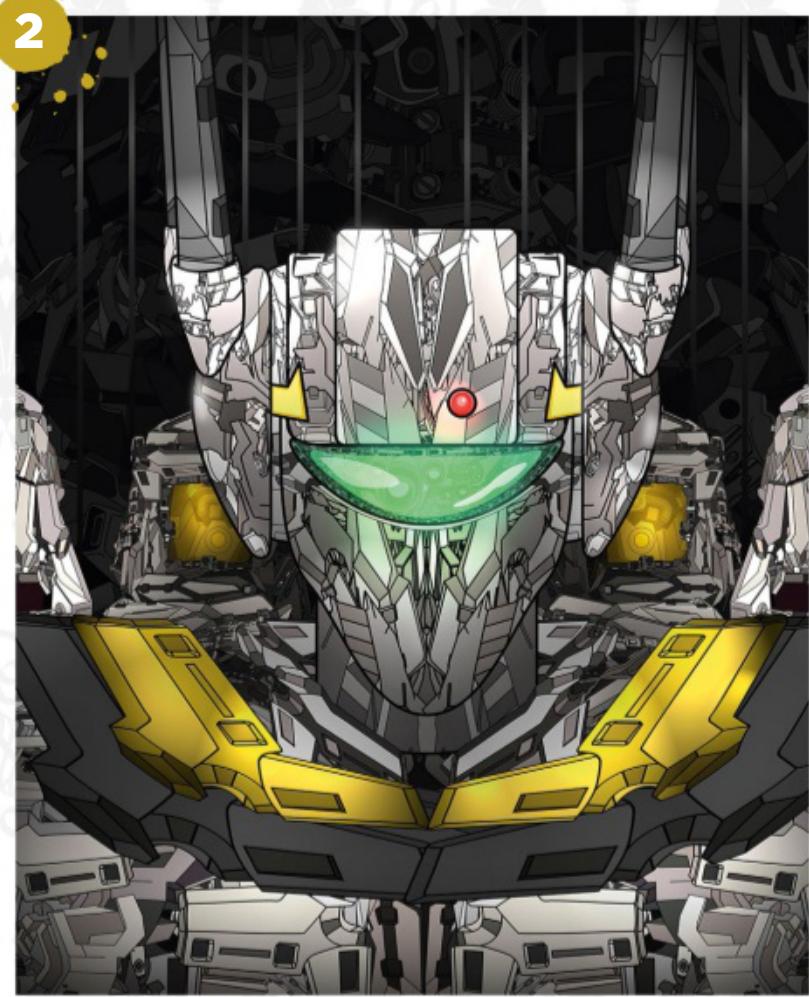
1 MYSTERIO

"Marvel Entertainment got in touch with me, and commissioned this piece as part of its licensing assets created to promote the film Spider-Man: Far From Home."

2 ROBOTECH X EEPMON VF-1S SKULL SQUADRON

"This stylised portrait of Roy Fokker's Valkyrie was applied on to limited edition Robotech x EEPMON aviator jackets. They went on show at San Diego Comic-Con this year."

2



3



3 HOMAGE TO THE LEGACY: DARTH VADER

"Here's a fan-art portrait based on my favourite heroes and villains who inhabit the Star Wars universe."

4 SPIDER-MAN

"Another one of my Marvel commissioned pieces to accompany the cinema release of Spider-Man: Far From Home."



© Marvel Entertainment



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Want to submit your work? Visit <http://ifxm.ag/getinifx>

November 2019

IMAGINEFX



13



John Henry Esteban

LOCATION: Philippines MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/johnhenryph

John taught himself how to paint by watching online tutorials. His main influences are the manga artists Eiichiro Oda and Masashi Kishimoto. John loves history and culture, and his artworks often depict life in the pre-colonial Philippines.

1 OKOT

"This is the god of hunting, and protector of the forest. For this piece I wanted to work outside my comfort zone. Trees, rocks and rays of light are elements that I don't usually tackle, but I'm pleased how they turned out."







Francisco Villa

LOCATION: Mexico **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/thepaintercat

Francisco's a self-taught artist who's always on the look-out for inspiration and challenges. Admiring how traditional 2D animators create believable worlds filled with life, he aims to do the same with his digital work.

1 DESERT

"A vision of an anthropomorphic duck in a meditative state. He enjoys the finer things in life: a nice car, a tailor-made suit and a taste for minimalistic landscapes."

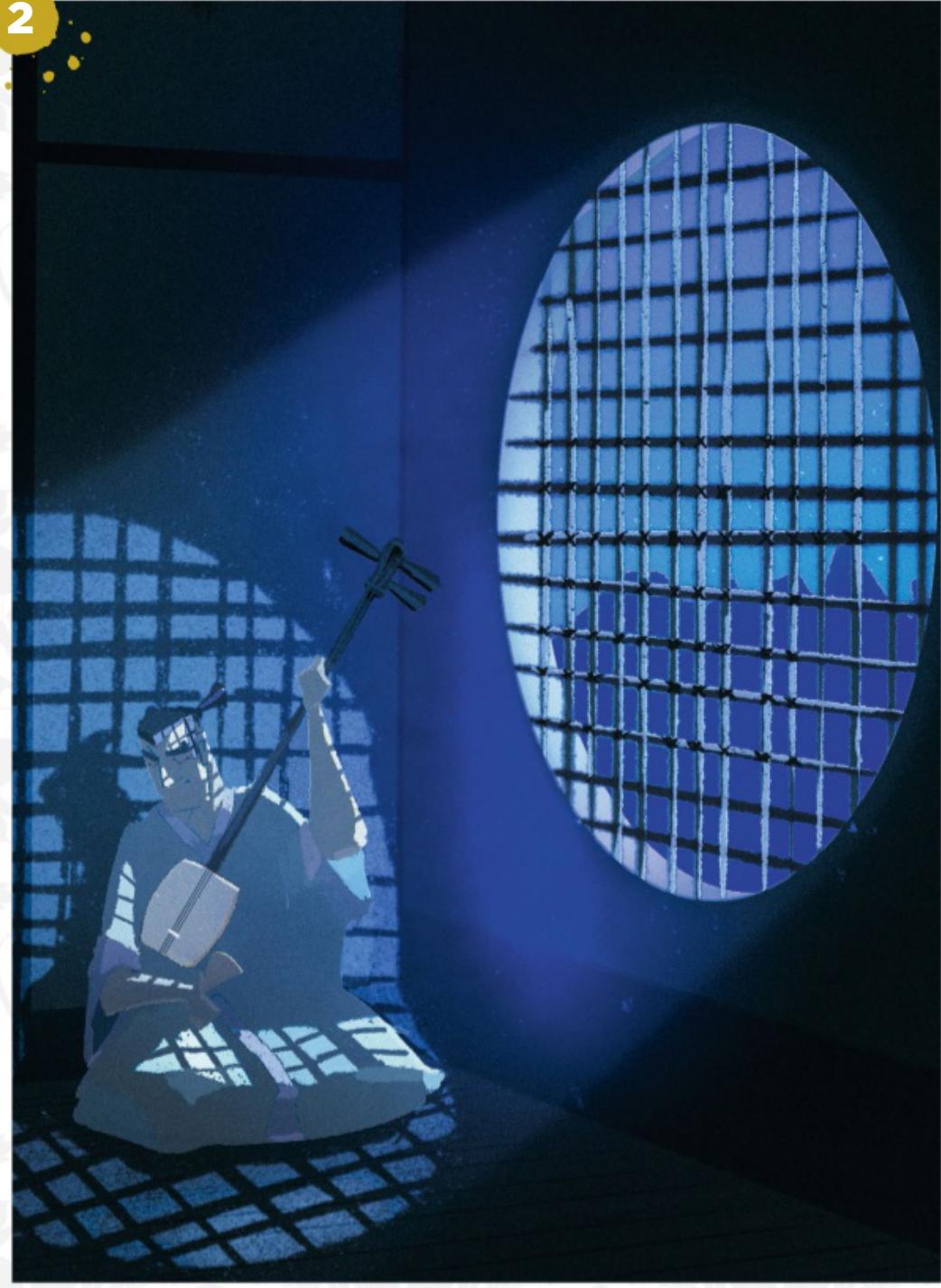
1



2 MOONLIGHT

"I've always been a fan of Genndy Tartakovsky. I believe Samurai Jack is one of his finest works, and a great example of what prime-time animation can achieve."

2



3



3 RACER

"A Dune-inspired piece of fan art. I visualised a young racer ready to hop into his new powerbike. He's a self-made man who gains respect and admiration from his ever-growing young fanbase."

4 CHARON

"This is how I imagine what a trip along the River Styx would be like: gently rowing along an endless blue waterway, with a total lack of beauty surrounding you."



ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

An early space pirate design
for Star Wars: The Force
Awakens by Lucasfilm design
supervisor Christian Alzmann.



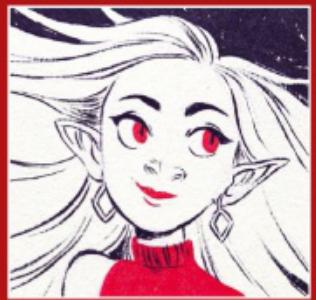
© Lucasfilm



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IMAGINEFX

November 2019



ON YOUR MARKS...

We hope you're ready for Inktober – it's just around the corner! Founder Jake Parker reveals his tips for getting the most out of the inking event.

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CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

Daren Bader shares his Florida studio set up, which shows how he's surrounded by the tools of his trade. He also reveals the funny secret he's kept from his wife...

Page 28



YOU WRITE, WE REPLY!

This month's letters reveal a lot of love for Kim Jung Gi, and our choice of featured artists, and the question of age-appropriate imagery in ImagineFX.

Page 33



Feng Zhu studied architecture before becoming a concept artist, which makes his buildings look extra-realistic.

How to succeed as a concept artist

Bright ideas Top concept artists tell **Gary Evans** how to get educated, get employed, and get better in art's most misunderstood field

Are you sure you want to be a concept artist? After all, concept artists don't get to draw whatever they want. They don't even get to draw famous characters very often – if ever. Plus, most of their drawings will never see the light of day.

Disappointed? Hold up, there's more. Concept artists don't spend all their time playing video games. They

don't generally hang out on film sets or hang around with big-name actors. They don't live especially glamorous lives. They're not really famous. They're not really rich. Concept art is repetitive. Concept art is labour-intensive. Concept art is hard to get good at and harder to get a job in. In fact, you could even argue concept art isn't really art.

Ben Mauro says, "I was inspired by manga artist Masamune Shirow and the cyberpunk novel Altered Carbon by Richard K Morgan."



"Concept art is very different from just drawing," **Feng Zhu** says. He has over a decade's experience working on

Transformers, Call of Duty, and Star Wars. "In reality, about 90 per cent of our work is grounded and pretty dry. Even when you are on a high-profile project, the 'fun' stuff generally lasts about a month or so. The other two or three months are generally filled with more mundane stuff: how landing gear folds out, arranging button layouts in a cockpit, say." Feng reckons that only one out every 10 images makes it to the next round of production.



"This industry looks fun and easy from the outside," Feng says, "but it's very difficult once you try it."

“It’s better to go to the source material and interpret it for yourself”



➡ **Christian Alzmann** says it's not uncommon to work on a design for months, only for it to be cut from the final film. Christian is concept design supervisor at Lucasfilm. He worked on Rogue One: A Star Wars Story and Star Wars: The Force Awakens. His job isn't making art; it's solving problems. His boss might say: 'I need some concepts – this afternoon – for a vehicle that flies, but can't have wings or rotors, and has to



Action shot of a “crab-tonomous military vehicle” – a personal piece by Ben.

Grenade and Spider's laptop concepts from Ben's work on the Matt Damon movie Elysium.

fit into the style of this film sequel.’ The picture Christian comes up with is ‘just the math formula we use to show our solution to the problem.’

BREAKING INTO THE INDUSTRY

Art school is more expensive and less important than it's ever been. **Ben**



Mauro says some of today's best concept artists – particularly the new generation – taught themselves using free or

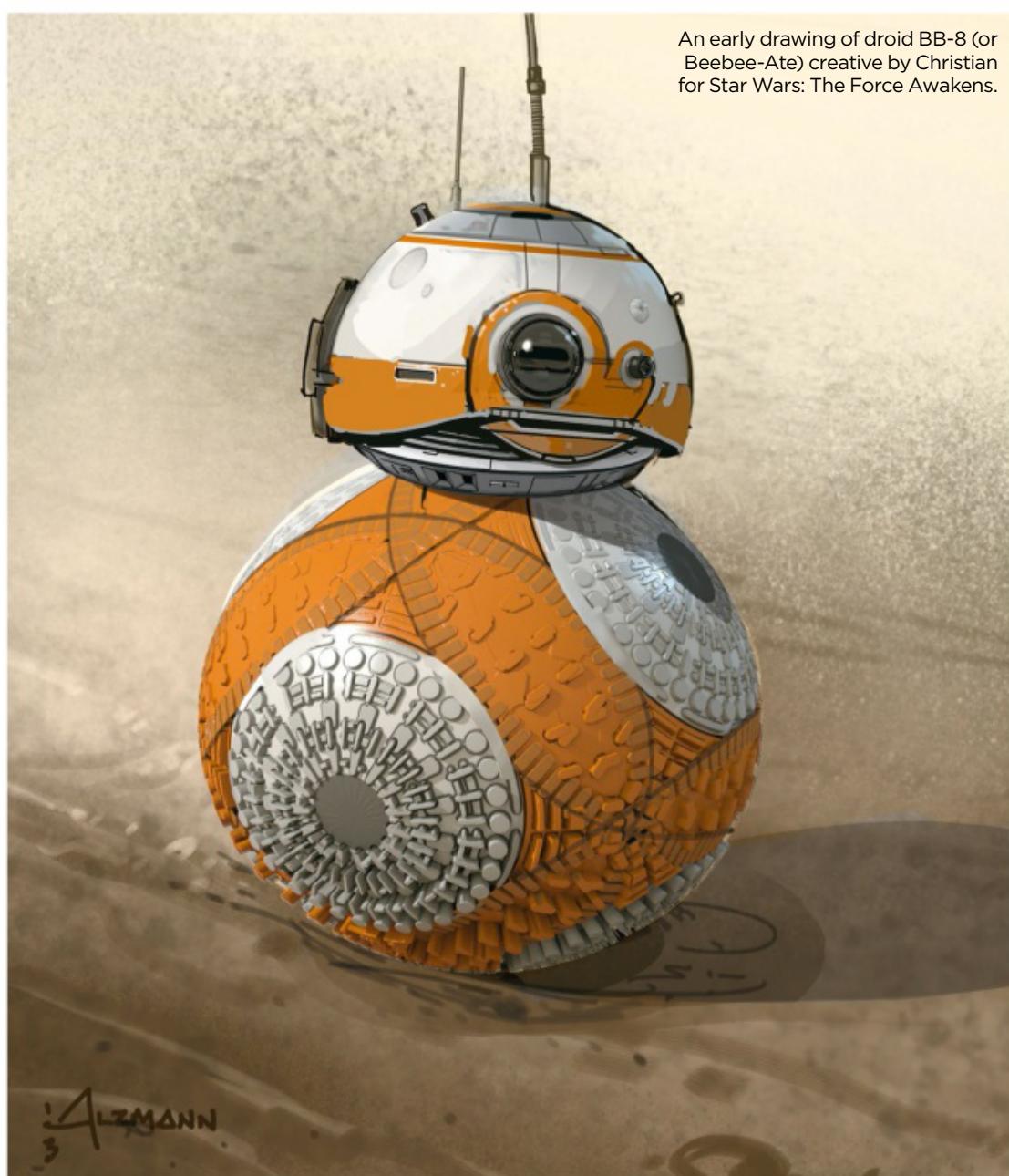
cheap online resources. Ben is senior concept designer at Seattle game developer 343 Industries. His credits include Halo and Call of Duty, and he also worked on the new Metal Gear Solid film. Ben would go down the self-taught route, were he to start out today. He likes tutorial sites Gumroad, Schoolism and Learn Squared, but also recommends smaller specialists schools – like Feng's FZD School of Design in Singapore, or Concept Design Academy, The Workshop Academy, and Brainstorm School in the US. The crucial thing is that you learn from working professionals.

Two of the most important basic skills, Christian says, are perspective and directional lighting. You should study frames from your favourite films to see how these things are used to tell the story. Master those and you can move on to the exciting bit: finding your own style.

To do this, Ben suggests you study widely – automotive design, architecture, fashion, film history, art history, biology... In short: don't make “derivative works of other people's interpretations of these things; it's

© Sony Pictures





better to go to the source material and interpret it for yourself." That being said, derivative isn't all bad. You need to be comfortable working in the latest design trends. It's a balancing act.

GETTING NOTICED

It's not enough to do good work. You also have to get your work seen. Consider scheduling time to share your art and look for work. When you're ready, Ben says, send your online portfolio (ArtStation is good, Squarespace if you want something

Feng says effective concept art is "done well, grounded, and shows a good understanding of functionality."

more personalised) to the company or franchise you want to work for. It's good to have direct contact, but that might take a bit of detective work. Conventions are good places to meet people – nothing wrong with asking to email them your portfolio. Otherwise, search Facebook, LinkedIn, ArtStation. If you can't find a contact, try and piece it together by figuring out how that company formats its email addresses (is it `firstname@company.com` or `firstname.surname@company.com?`). Send friendly, professional ➤

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

What do concept artists use to help them do their job?

Stephan Martinière

3ds Max

I'm working on the Foundation TV series for Apple TV, Shang-Chi for Marvel, and Venom 2 for Sony. For me, it's 3ds Max, which enables me to explore intricate design ideas that would be difficult to create on paper.

www.martiniere.com

Ben Mauro

Blender

Blender 2.8 is so easy to learn and use. It just feels like I'm playing and having fun instead of working – and it's free! There are many amazing online resources and plugins: HardOps, Boxcutter, KitOps, Meshmachine and Decalmachine, for example. I highly recommend it!

www.benmaurodesign.com

Even Mehl Amundsen

Procreate

It's intuitive, responsive, expanding and mobile. I do most of my work on the move these days, and it makes a huge difference to be able to take it with me anywhere.

<http://ifxm.ag/even-am>

JC Park

15-inch Macbook Pro and Intuos Pro tablet

I really like Mac OS for digital painting work. It's also quite a stable environment for running Photoshop. The Intuos tablet is really comfortable and the surface doesn't heat up like other tablets.

www.artstation.com/jcpark

Christian Alzmann

Post-it notes

I use a lot of 3D software now for my work, but I still love to sketch my ideas on Post-it notes. Also, when running low on inspiration, I'll watch some of my favourite films or look through my favourite art books.

www.christianalzmann.com



"Salvage pirates racing to get first dibs on a crashed ship," reveals Christian, on an unused storyboard for *The Force Awakens*.

© Lucasfilm



"Most designers who stand out are just doing what they love," says Feng

➡ emails and then one or two polite follow-up messages.

Your portfolio should prove you're ready to start immediately; that you understand the company's style. Alternatively, you could build a portfolio that demonstrates your own, unique style. This is a bit riskier, but your style or speciality might offer the thing that company is currently missing. Ben's portfolio is a mix.

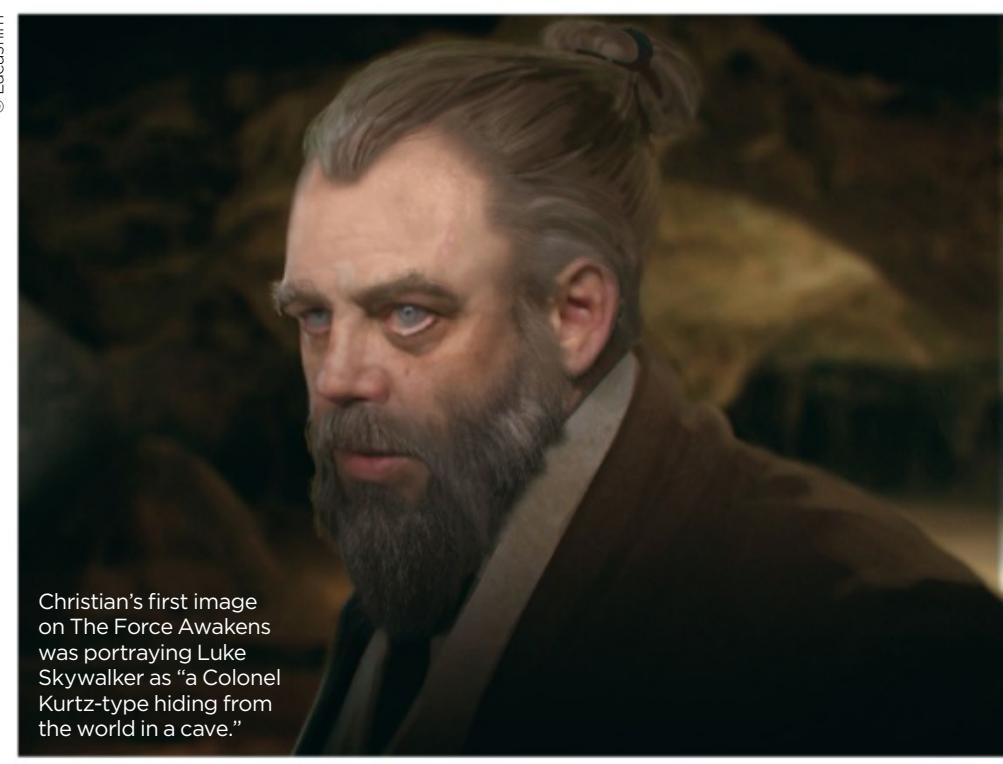
Feng says there are three main positions for concept artists. Seniors create "world-building images such as lead characters and environment establishing shots" and "are rarely involved in labour intensive work." Mid-levels also design characters and environments, but they're still required

to roll up their sleeves and do some labour-intensive stuff. Juniors do all of the hard work: designing variations, doing orthographics, cleaning up line drawings, and extracting line details from digital paintings that have been created by seniors or freelancers.

TALKING SHOP

Ben believes that being good at art is only half the job. You need to be a great communicator. If you're an off-site freelancer then this skill is especially important because it's unlikely you'll be able to speak to people face to face. You need to know to give the client what they want. You sometimes need to help the client work out what they want, too. ➡

© Lucasfilm



Christian's first image on *The Force Awakens* was portraying Luke Skywalker as "a Colonel Kurtz-type hiding from the world in a cave."

Artist news, software & events

Ben's P.K.F. Drone, part of a personal project of robots and weapons developed for a workshop at the Concept Design Academy in Pasadena.



“Seniors create world-building art and are rarely involved in labour-intensive work”

Feng says too many young artists lack patience: "They're aiming for the moon and wanting to get there in a single day."



► Deadlines are usually tight. Typically, you receive a brief on Monday, finish it Thursday, then meet or speak with the client on Friday. Your concept designs must not only solve but also preempt problems for every person on the production line. For example, can the actor interact with it? Can the cinematographer achieve cool shots with it? Can the director create better, more compelling moments in the story with it?

You could be designing a small prop that takes a couple of weeks, or you could be spending four years designing a whole world, a whole universe. Ben says: "I've had jobs where I was asked to do one little prop for two weeks that ended up with me being hired to design the rest of the film for two, three years after that."

As a concept artist, you're always an apprentice in a job where nobody ever really becomes a master. Tools, trends

One of Ben's most famous piece, Gorilla Tank – which is also available to buy as a model kit.

“The best project for me was Star Wars. The team was awesome...”

and workflows change quickly and often, so you have to keep studying. Ben has over a decade's experience in the industry, but he still watches tutorials every single week. The thing that all top concept artists have in common is “being highly adaptable and having the curiosity and enthusiasm to never stop learning.”

LIVING IN YOUR IMAGINATION

So you still want to be a concept artist? Well, there are few more things you need to know. You get to be creative every day. You get to live in your imagination. You may even get paid to play the occasional video game. You might meet the odd movie star and visit the odd film set. You get paid to draw every day.

Your ideas – landing parts or cockpit buttons, characters or creatures – will become reality. Your solution to a certain problem will become greater than the sum of its parts, as hundreds of people work together to put it up on the big screen, or as part of a gaming experience played by thousands. Every now and then, you'll get the job

Artist news, software & events



©Lucasfilm

Feng says, "To have longevity in this industry, you have to be able to mentally adjust to all types of situations."



Christian's work on the death of Han Solo in The Force Awakens, which was first revealed in the book The Art of The Last Jedi, to avoid potential spoilers.

of drawing the flashy, pretty, epic picture, a concept that could be considered art in its own right.

"When you're working with a cool client on a cool project," Feng says, "it really doesn't feel like a job. The best project for me was Star Wars. The team was awesome, the director was nice – the project was a dream come true. I went to work happy all the time. Driving up to Skywalker Ranch every morning was so surreal."



Ben's work sculpting chimps in ZBrush, a tutorial for which is available on his Artstation page.

"When you make an ink stroke on paper you're committed," says Jake Parker. "It's a challenge, but it's also liberating."



Jake initially launched Inktober as a means of improving his Japanese brush pen technique.

Derek Laufman has completed Inktober every year since discovering it in 2014.

Happy 10th birthday Inktober!

Visible ink As the art challenge celebrates a milestone year in 2019, we get the low-down from the founder and contributors on just how Inktober has become so popular

This year marks the 10th birthday of Inktober, the art challenge that asks participants to create an ink drawing every day in October. To celebrate reaching double figures, 2019's event will feature competitions, with art supplies on offer as prizes.

What makes Inktober different from other challenges? "It was one of the few perennial art challenges to start before social media took a foothold in our culture," says founder **Jake Parker**.



"Its popularity rose as more and more people shared their art on places such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram."

"The digital age has spoiled us all with its endless possibilities, but

nothing can replace the feel of paper and the absolute concentration one needs when drawing with a real pen," adds regular participant **Alexa Pásztor**.

"The community aspect of the challenge is a great motivation and every year it feels like the most creative month," says artist **Daria Golab**. "I can't imagine October without Inktober."



“The community aspect of the Inktober challenge is a great motivation...”

Another positive thing about Inktober is its flexibility, with the focus on improving and forming positive habits. "I've never completed the challenge, but I always end up with

a collection of drawings I feel proud of," says illustrator **Cathrine Sandmæl**. "I've even secured some client work because of them."

If you're going to aim for the full 31 drawings then you'll need to be organised. Jake suggests prepping your tools and drawing area in advance and sketching ideas in September, so October can be all about inking. "These drawings take anywhere from two to four hours,

Artist news, software & events



Inktober provides Alexa Pásztor with the motivation to reconnect with traditional art tools.



"Most of my recent client work requires me to work in colour, but the Inktober challenge gives me a chance to switch it up for a bit," says Cathrine Sandmæl.

"Inktober is a great exercise in consistency, working faster, coming up with ideas in a short time and forming good drawing habits," says Daria Golab.



which is a big chunk of my work day," says artist **Derek Laufman**, who has completed the challenge in full every year since 2014. "I set aside a designated time each day to make it happen."

Check out www.inktober.com for more information and the all-important daily prompts, and don't forget to follow the hashtags **#inktober** and **#inktober2019** across social media.

Alexa Pásztor prefers to spend more time on each illustration, and create just a few complete ink drawings across the month.

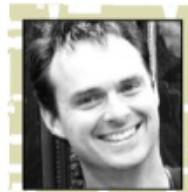
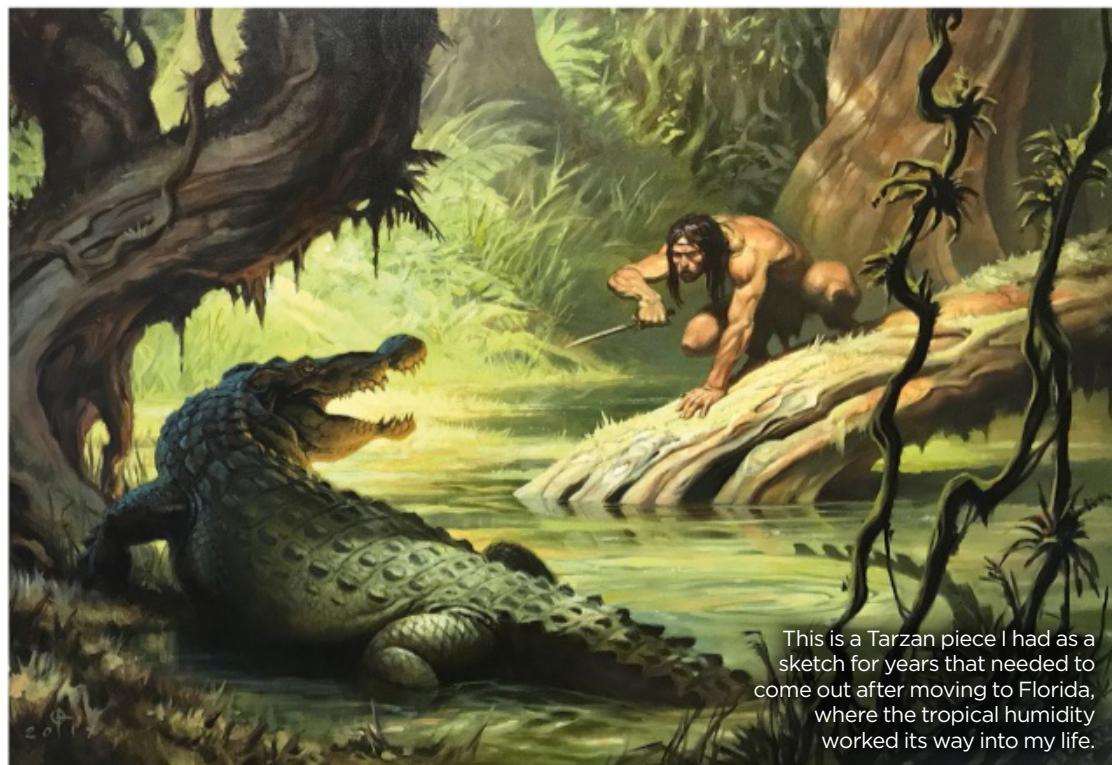


Cathrine's advice for a successful Inktober is to relax and not worry about missing a day or two.



Daren Bader

Finding the function The US illustrator and art director shows us around his wooden-floored studio, mindful that it's not the most practical of spaces



About three-and-a-half years ago, I moved to Florida from California to join an emerging tech

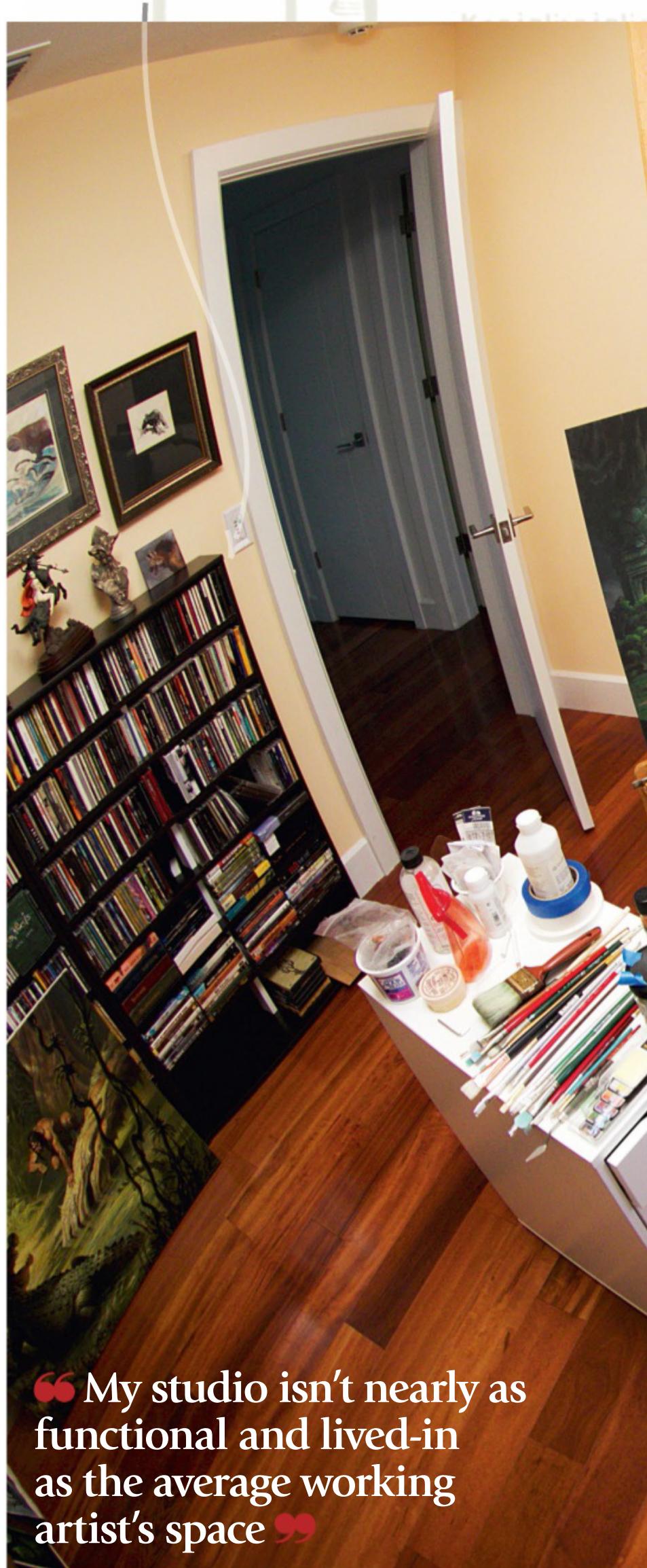
company called Magic Leap as a senior art director. I left behind over 10 years of art direction on the Red Dead franchise at Rockstar Games, as well as a custom-built art studio that had accumulated over 25 years of "stuff" (my wife calls it "hoarding").

The move forced me to put a lot of things in storage, including old sculptures, larger framed artwork, six-foot rolled canvases, a couple of boxes of skulls and bones, and a large amount of action figures (that my wife still thinks I threw away).

I mention all of this because I think it's important to know that my studio isn't nearly as functional and lived-in as the average working artist's space. I don't have the room for lots of ➤



Music has always played a huge role in helping me get into the zone, and even though I enjoy streaming services, I'll never tire of picking out just the right CD to set the proper painting mood.



“My studio isn't nearly as functional and lived-in as the average working artist's space”

This Florida-inspired piece used to be a cheap print of a plant of some sort, but the fake alligator skin frame was really calling out for something a little more appropriate!

Artist news, software & events

More remnants from the house move: a fully functioning printer that's been boxed now for four years, but serves as a junk table. Well, I assume it to be fully functioning, since it was when I packed it.

I use my walls of my studio as storage for some of my framed art, occasionally swapping them out when I get tired of looking at them.

I have many other sculptures and skulls still boxed away, but I was really happy to finally unpack a few of them for display on my new cabinet.



This small bank of drawers is the most useful piece of furniture in my studio, as it holds all my supplies and doubles as a desk while I'm painting. I have sliding pads under it so I can push it to any spot I need while I move around the room searching for decent light.

My wife hates this chair. I've had it for about 27 years, and it certainly looks like it. But for whatever reason, I still have it. Though I'm positive there are much better options out there these days...

So much is hidden behind these brand new cabinet doors! Old and new sketchbooks, boxes of Magic: The Gathering artist proofs and cards, convention supplies, and more besides. Note the crate of things that still didn't fit!

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



► supplies or a suitable drawing table. It's not as well lit as it should be. I don't have enough space to work on large canvases. I have wooden floors that need protection every time I break out the paints. I have a glass desktop that doesn't take kindly to metal objects such as X-Acto knives or screwdrivers.

Overall, it's kind of a delicate room that requires caution and calm, as opposed to a proper creative space that would enable me to throw paint around and bang out clay sculptures.

GETTING THE JOB DONE

However, I love the space I do have. It's a haven for me with all of my reference and art books, sculptures, CDs and small original art collection. And when I finally have the time to sit down and do some work, I have my essentials to get the job done. I've got a 24-inch Wacom Cintiq Touch for all my digital work, utilising Photoshop almost exclusively. And I've got my go-to

My interpretation of the classic Mesoamerican mythology of Quetzalcoatl. I may have to redo this piece at a larger scale to truly make the impact I was shooting for.

Königliche –

This is my 'corner of good vibes', with my Spectrum gold award and some original art by a few of my biggest inspirations. I'm particularly fond of the painting by Chris Moeller, as it was done as a pin-up for my Tribes of Kai book.



easel that can easily handle small to medium-large canvases. I do end up having to do most of my sketching while lounging on the couch in the front room, but that's been my natural sketching location since day one.

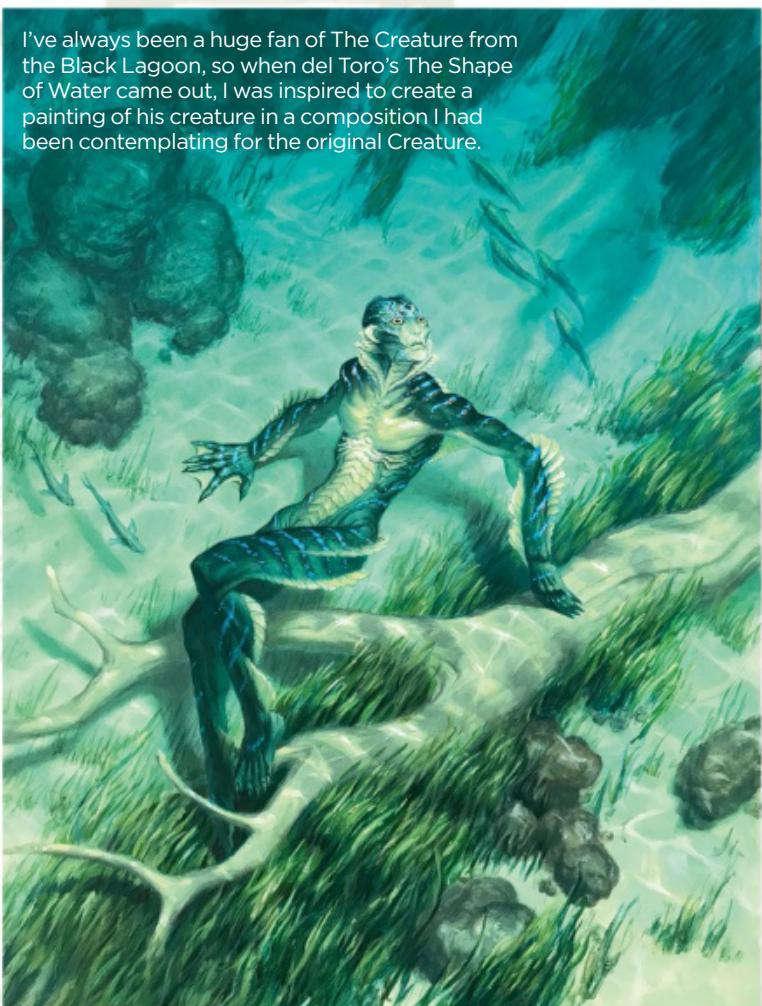
Until very recently (three days before these pictures were taken, as it turns out), I still had a few large moving boxes of essential supplies and various knick-knacks camouflaged as end tables, but I finally had a custom cabinet made to hide away as much

stuff as possible, as well as provide a proper shelf for some sculptures. This addition has been one of the final steps in pulling together my studio into something that really works for me, as well as something my spouse isn't embarrassed to show visitors. Which, of course, is the goal of all artists.

Daren has been a video game art director for over 25 years, and has maintained a freelance career the whole time as an outlet for his digital and traditional art. You can see his work at www.darenbader.com.

“I have wooden floors that need protection every time I break out the paints”

Artist news, software & events



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Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



Contact the editor, Claire Howlett, on claire@imaginefx.com or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England



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Sketching the master

Just sharing a Copic sketch I did of Master Kim. I'm so excited for this issue [ImagineFX's issue 178 featuring Kim Jung Gi on the cover]. ImagineFX is the one and only publication I look forward to every month, and cover stories like this are what makes you guys the absolute best.

Jimmy Huber, via email

Claire replies This sketch is fantastic Jimmy, thanks so much for sharing it with us. You have captured likeness to Kim Jung Gi. We've had lots of fantastic feedback about this edition. KJG is a true master and I was honoured to feature him in our publication. I always strive to get the best artists inside these pages and I consider myself very fortunate to be able to work with artists of this calibre.

Art that's too intense?

First, can I say how much I continue to enjoy receiving my subscription copy of ImagineFX every month. It's a great magazine and it's clear a lot of care goes into its production. It doesn't just go



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can still get hold of it. Visit <https://ifxm.ag/ifx-178>

through the motions as some magazines do. I've been really impressed by the calibre of recent articles and the artists you've chosen to be featured.

As someone who picked up issue one in the shops and started a subscription straight away (or thereabouts), I was particularly amused by this month's cover (issue 177), which put a great twist on the arguments some people used to make about typically having buxom women on the cover. First-rate choice.

I just wanted to say I was a little unsure about the choice of image for the tutorial by Ivan Khomenko on cinematic keyframe art. It's a strong image, but I wonder if it's too intense. With two young children in the house, one of whom is really keen on art, I'm aware I have to be more careful about where I leave my copies. Sure, it's always full of monsters and scantily clad people of both/all genders, but the graphic depiction of human-on-human violence (it appears that the figure on the floor has had much of their face shot off) seems to cross a line for a magazine that's not usually for adults only.

I cancelled my subscription a while back and wrote in after an image was included of a man ripping another man's jaw off, which seemed just that bit too unpleasant. At the time I thought it was time to move on from ImagineFX. I guess I couldn't keep away for too long and renewed my subscription a few months later.

I'm not in a hurry to cancel again, but wanted to urge you to watch out for any images that perhaps move more into the human world than the fantasy one.

Anyway, thanks for putting together such a great magazine each month.

David Salstein, via email

Claire replies David, thanks for your thoughtful email. I also loved the cover image for our character design issue, created by Aleksey Baydakov, and we chose that style of image for precisely the reasons you outline, so I'm very pleased that it got noted.

As to your comments about Ivan Khomenko's workshop image, I apologise if this has caused upset. I hadn't considered the image to be a different direction from what we usually do, but your email certainly has given me pause for thought. However, it's worth noting that our magazine isn't aimed at children. I would say the youngest readers are perhaps of student age – 16 upwards, but most are in their 20s and 30s. What do others think? Did this image hit the wrong note? I'd really like to hear your thoughts.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Justyna @roeve



miyosa_drawing @miyosa_drawing



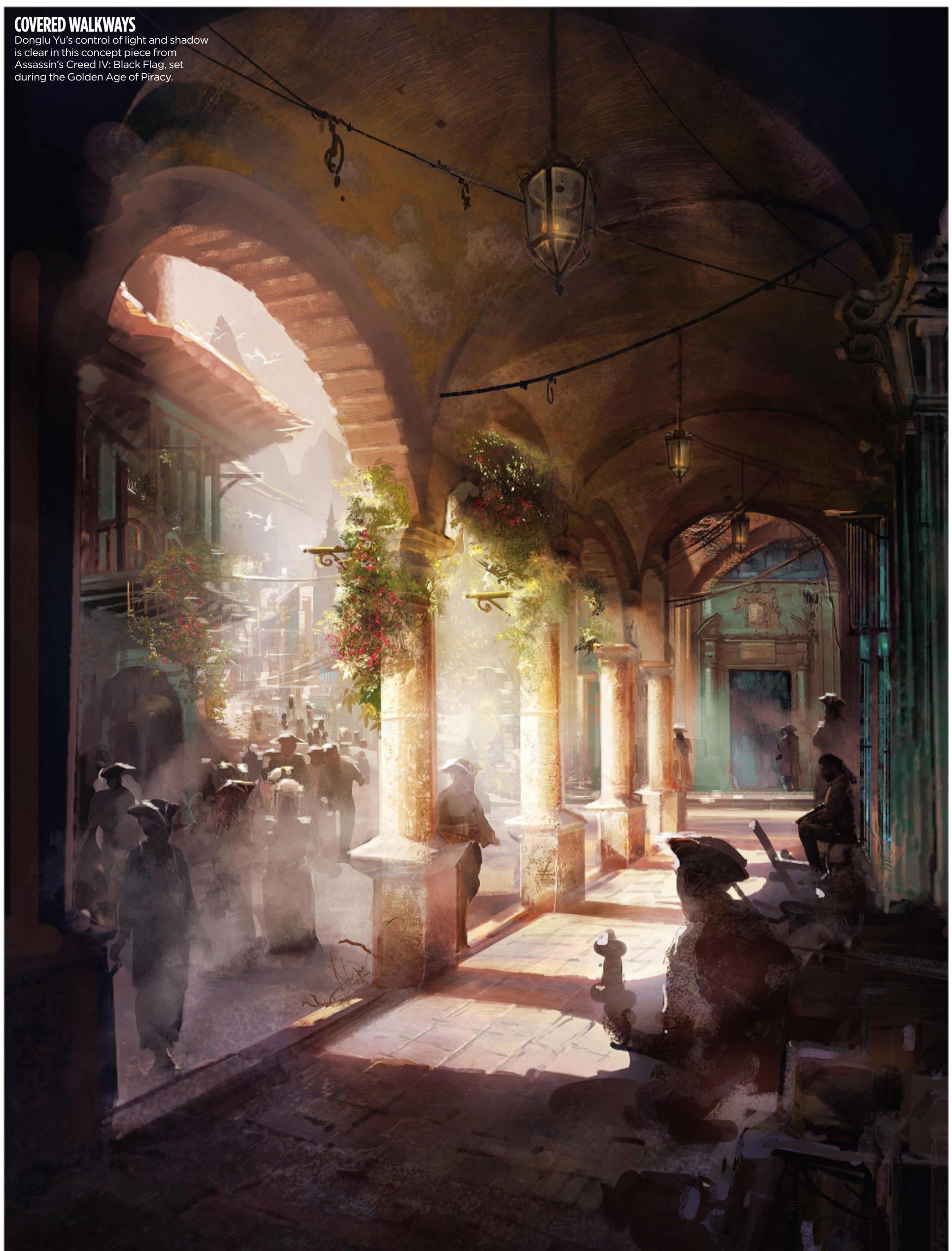
Sargy Art @sargy_art

If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on Twitter or Instagram, and use the hashtag #imaginefx

Interview

COVERED WALKWAYS

Donglu Yu's control of light and shadow is clear in this concept piece from Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag, set during the Golden Age of Piracy.



All Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag and Far Cry 4 Artwork © Ubisoft Entertainment SA



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

DONGLU YU

Garrick Webster talks to the concept artist about her work on games such as Assassin's Creed, her creative heritage, and helping the next generation of artists



What makes a great computer game? For some it's the cut and thrust of the action, while for others it's the problem-solving and interactivity involved.

However, for a game to go down in legend these days it's really about developing a truly immersive environment. That's why the skills of hugely talented concept artists like Donglu Yu are so valuable to the gaming industry. Based at Ubisoft in Montréal, Canada, Donglu's creativity has helped shape the Assassin's Creed

WHITE CHERRY

Cherry blossoms among wafts of mist help create the atmosphere in Far Cry 4's fictional Himalayan kingdom of Kyrat, as painted by Donglu.

franchise – arguably the most visually appealing and immersive video game series of all time.

"The video games industry is becoming more and more competitive, both in terms of becoming a concept artist and making successful, triple-A products," says Donglu. "Concept art has never just been about creating beautiful paintings. It's about finding design ideas, exploring visual and thematic variety in order to enhance the player's experience. And for me, that's really the fun and challenging part of my job."

Artist PROFILE

Donglu Yu

LOCATION: Canada

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, John Singer Sargent

SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop

WEB: www.artstation.com/donglu

Players around the world certainly have her to thank for the atmosphere generated in titles like Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood (2010), set in a richly envisaged late-15th century, or Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag ➤

Interview

WORSHIP

Donglu helped nail down the setting in Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag with this colonial church and city square in Havana.



NEW SPAIN

The view down to the bay – a killer's playground, again for Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag.



URBAN CHOPS

Donglu experimented with a restricted palette for her personal series entitled Edge.

“I couldn’t release any new artwork in this period, even though I produced thousands of pieces, but I learned a lot”

» (2013). The latter is one of Donglu’s favourites and took the dark intrigue of the series to a whole new level with an 18th century setting and colonialism and piracy as key themes. However, her portfolio isn’t solely historical, and she was a driving force on cyberpunk-themed Deus Ex: Human Revolution (2010) with Eidos as well as Far Cry 4 (2014), with its fictionalised Himalayan setting.

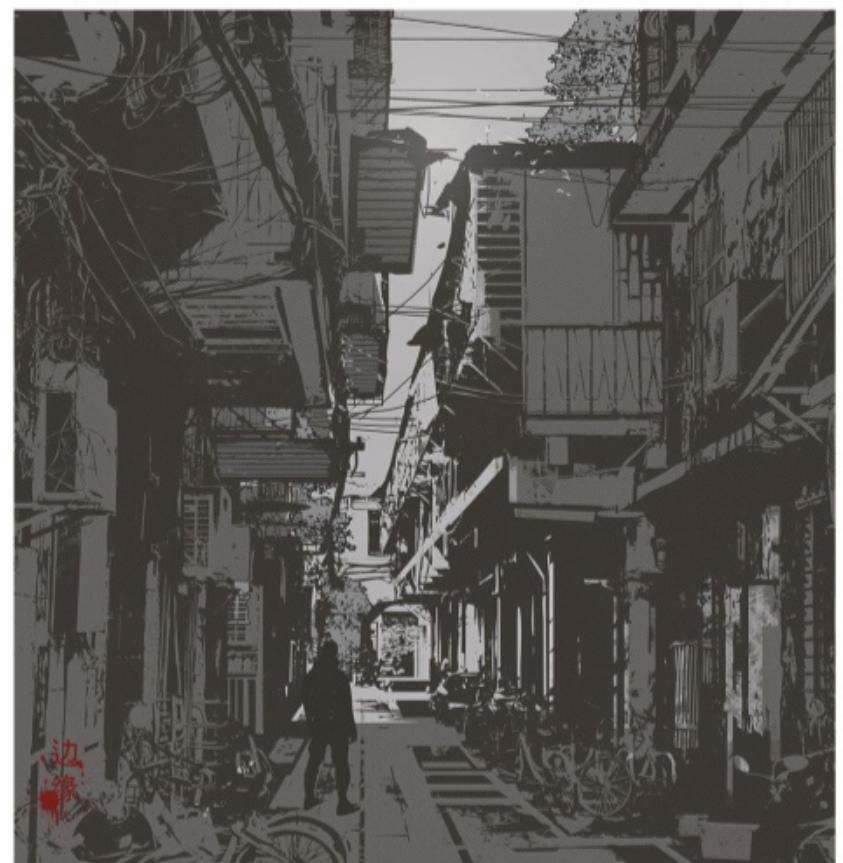
LEARNING THROUGH FRUSTRATION

After Far Cry, she went to Warner Montreal and later EA, helping them develop new game ideas which were

interesting but neither project came to market. A frustrating time for the artist, but one she learned from.

“I couldn’t release any new professional artwork in this period, even though I produced thousands of pieces, but I learned a lot,” says Donglu. “Prior to that I mainly worked on established franchises, but developing new IPs was a completely different experience.”

“Exploring new visual directions in the beginning can be lot of fun,” she continues, “but a new game requires a whole system and pipeline behind it to make it work properly, including ➤



VISUAL STIMULATION

Painted to encourage students to join the CGPB programme, this concept image is evocative of Blade Runner's neon-lit world.



THE CGPB MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

Donglu Yu wants to help junior artists find a smoother path into the world of concept art...

Having moved from China to Canada as a child, and establishing herself in Montreal's games development community, Donglu is now focusing on helping other artists from her homeland on their creative journeys.

In 2016, she set up Computer Graphics Portfolio Boost (CGPB) with her husband Jack Zhang, a former 3D artist in the video games industry. While Donglu focuses on the image making, Jack helps young artists

develop and apply their artwork in the 3D pipeline. With complementary skills, their mentorship programme is unique and interesting to young Chinese artists and each mentorship typically lasts a couple of months. Currently only available in Chinese due to time constraints, the pair may open it to wider audiences at a later date.

"I realised a few years ago that young Chinese artists are eager to

learn more about how we make video games in North America. Because China is dominated by mobile games, this kind of knowledge is harder to access. Because my early art training is rooted in Chinese culture, I really wanted to do something meaningful for this community of young artists," Donglu explains.

You can find out more about CGPB by visiting its Facebook page at <https://ifxm.ag/donglu-cgpb>.





» the high-level creative vision of the game – the game engine, the budget, the development length, and so on. That's usually the most challenging part, which causes hiccups in the development of a new IP."

Donglu also did some early concept work for this year's live-action version of *The Lion King*, and she's continuing her work on the *Assassin's Creed* series at Ubisoft, liaising closely with art director Raphael Lacoste. Outside her work commitments she's started a concept art mentorship programme with her husband, Jack Zhang.

STAYING TRUE TO HER ROOTS

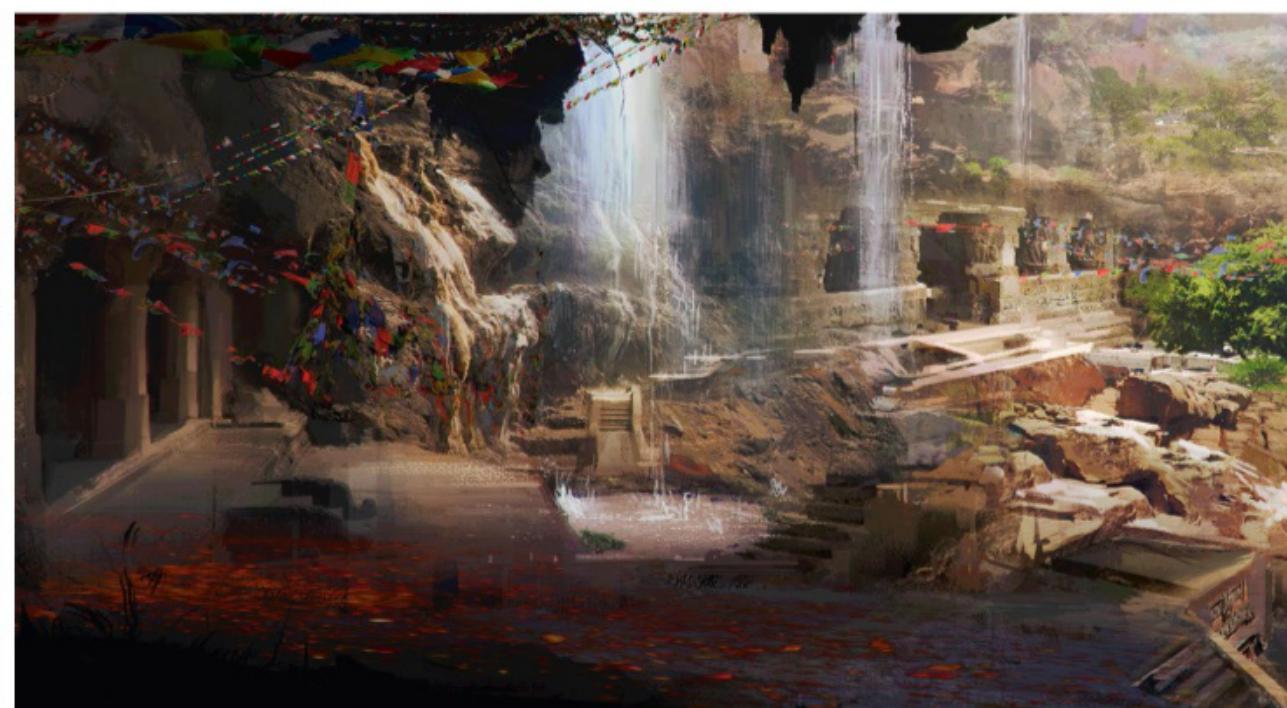
Now firmly rooted in the Montreal games community, Donglu's Chinese heritage has fed into her style and her ethos. After emigrating from China to Canada with her family when she was 12, Donglu spent a year learning French, but remained true to the

SEASCAPE

It's not just the detailed vessel. The weather, time of day, sea conditions and lighting all help generate the atmosphere in this *Assassin's Creed* concept image.

WATERFALL

Critics praised *Far Cry 4* for its open world and visual appeal, which Donglu helped create through concept images such as this mountain cave.

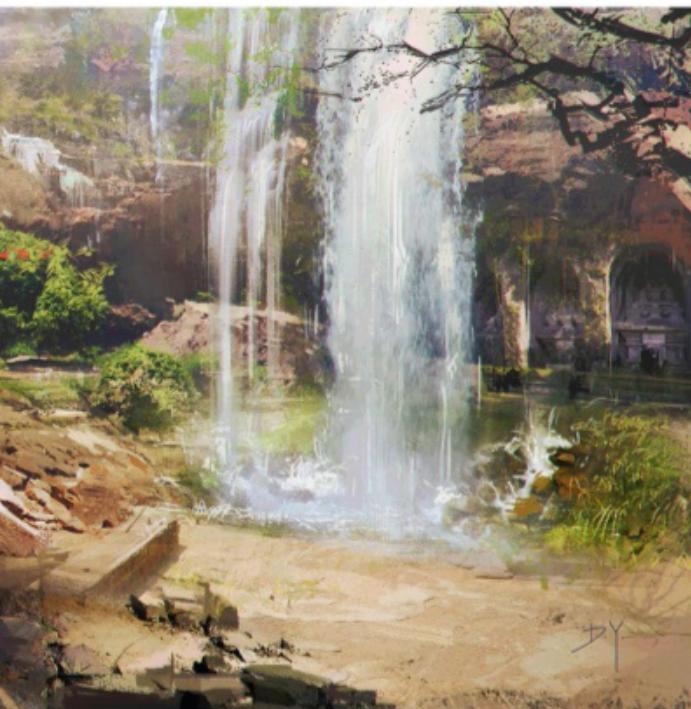


Chinese painting techniques that she learned from her family.

"My grandfather was a renowned Chinese calligrapher," she says, "and my mother always dreamed of being an artist. I guess artistic blood runs in my veins and I took up Chinese watercolours, calligraphy, drawing from observation and oil painting during my childhood. Traditional art was the foundation for my career in digital art."

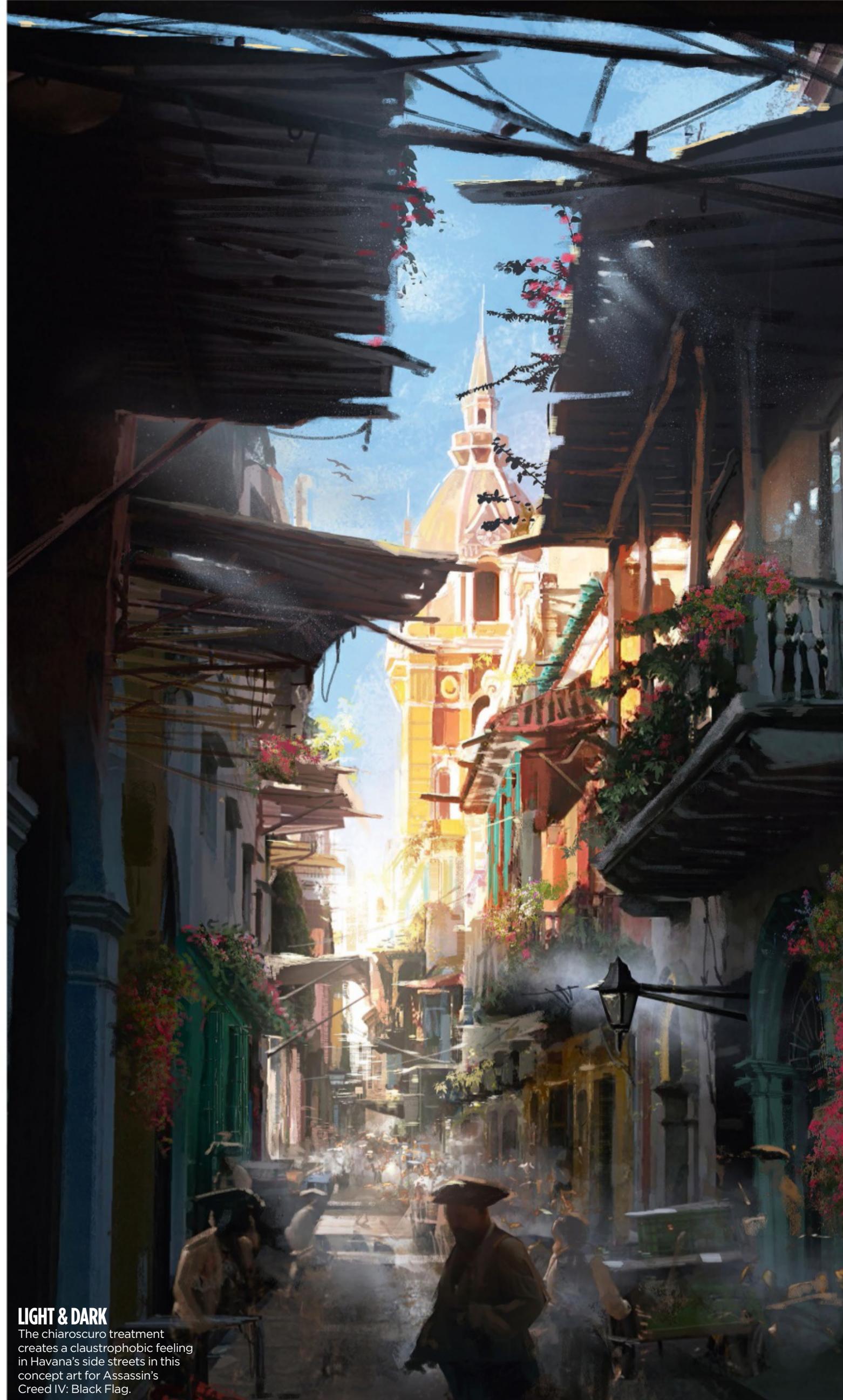
Donglu continues: "Chinese watercolours and calligraphy are all about controlling the brushstrokes and the density of the ink. Especially in calligraphy – if you miss one stroke there's no going back and patching it up, you have to start all over again. It's certainly an unforgiving medium. Getting into the habit of visualising the brushwork before putting ink on paper trained me to synthesise the forms and

“Traditional Chinese art was the foundation for my career in digital art”



make each stroke more impactful in the final image."

Visual impact is there to see across Donglu's work, and in addition to her concept art she enjoys tackling personal series. Her Cyberpunk images conjure a densely populated post-industrial city, chiaroscuro and glowing with pinks and blues from the neon signs that extend up the sides of the buildings as smog floats up ➡



Interview

THE DEPTHS

Underwater scenes were part of Donglu's domain when Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag was in production.



FLYING THE BLACK FLAG

Donglu tells us about one of her favourite – and demanding – concept art projects so far...

If you ask Donglu Yu about her career highlights, Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag is right up there. Set mainly in the Caribbean during the colonial period, the action takes place on pirate and privateer galleons as well as among the new towns and cities that were taking root in the New World. Donglu created artwork visualising three key

areas of the game: the Cuban city of Havana, the islands and the underwater environments.

"What was cool about the early conception period was that the art director gave us a very minimal brief and let us explore freely," she says. "We took inspiration from traditional oil paintings and different movies."



FAÇADES

The frontages Donglu designed for Black Flag directly helped the 3D artists texture the city of Havana.

As well as painting various mood images for the city of Havana, she and the other artists created what are called 'street stripes', which visualise the fronts of the houses in various parts of the city. "The 3D artists could take those concepts and translate them into house modules and build the city efficiently," says Donglu.

For the islands, she came up with as many shores and shapes as possible, so the player would have a richer gaming experience.

"The part that I enjoyed most was the underwater theme. I don't think there's anything more exciting than discovering an old wreck for a mysterious fantasy pirate experience. Raphael Lacoste and I gathered references for the underwater mood board in order to complete those scenes. VFX was also part of the discussion so the effects team could come up with graphic solutions for an immersive underwater experience."



DONGLU YU

WRECKAGE

What could be more exciting than
fighting off an assassin and
recovering treasure from the depths?

November 2019

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Interview

GOTHIC CASTLE

In this personal work, Donglu depicts a medieval city, based in part on real-life references from Spanish and Italian fortified cities.



from the streets. In a series called Edge, she constructs an oriental metropolis from light and shade, using a limited colour palette and from unlikely angles. Her personal work takes in a range of character studies as well, from dark horsemen to baroque princesses.

"Creating personal artwork is a meditative process for me," says Donglu. "It releases me from the constraints of video game production and I can explore new techniques and subjects."

ALLOWING AN IMAGE TO BREATHE

However, she still loves the slightly unfinished appearance of her concept art and has no leanings towards finishing a piece in fine art fashion. "I like to keep the rough look," Donglu says. "The loose parts enable the audience to complete the image in their imaginations and allow an image to breathe."

"When I paint, I make artistic choices about what to render. They're the things I want to talk about most

“I want my art to make humanity better. It's a big dream, but we can get there one day”

TEMPLE

The atmosphere inside one of Far Cry 4's temple settings illuminated in Donglu's masterful concept art.



EDGE

Another densely detailed but minimally coloured Eastern street scene from Donglu's Edge series.



and the contrast between loose and detailed is what makes an image visually appealing."

While continuing to work at Ubisoft in Montréal – she loves her team, and the city – Donglu would like to work on projects with a socially conscious element to them. Child slavery, famine and global warming are issues she wants to highlight. "I want my art to have an impact and make humanity better," says Donglu. "It's a big dream, but with small steps I believe we can get there one day."

As for new projects to watch out for, the artist is currently working on something big but, as is the norm in the games industry, it's all under wraps. We'll tell you more as soon as it's unveiled... ☀



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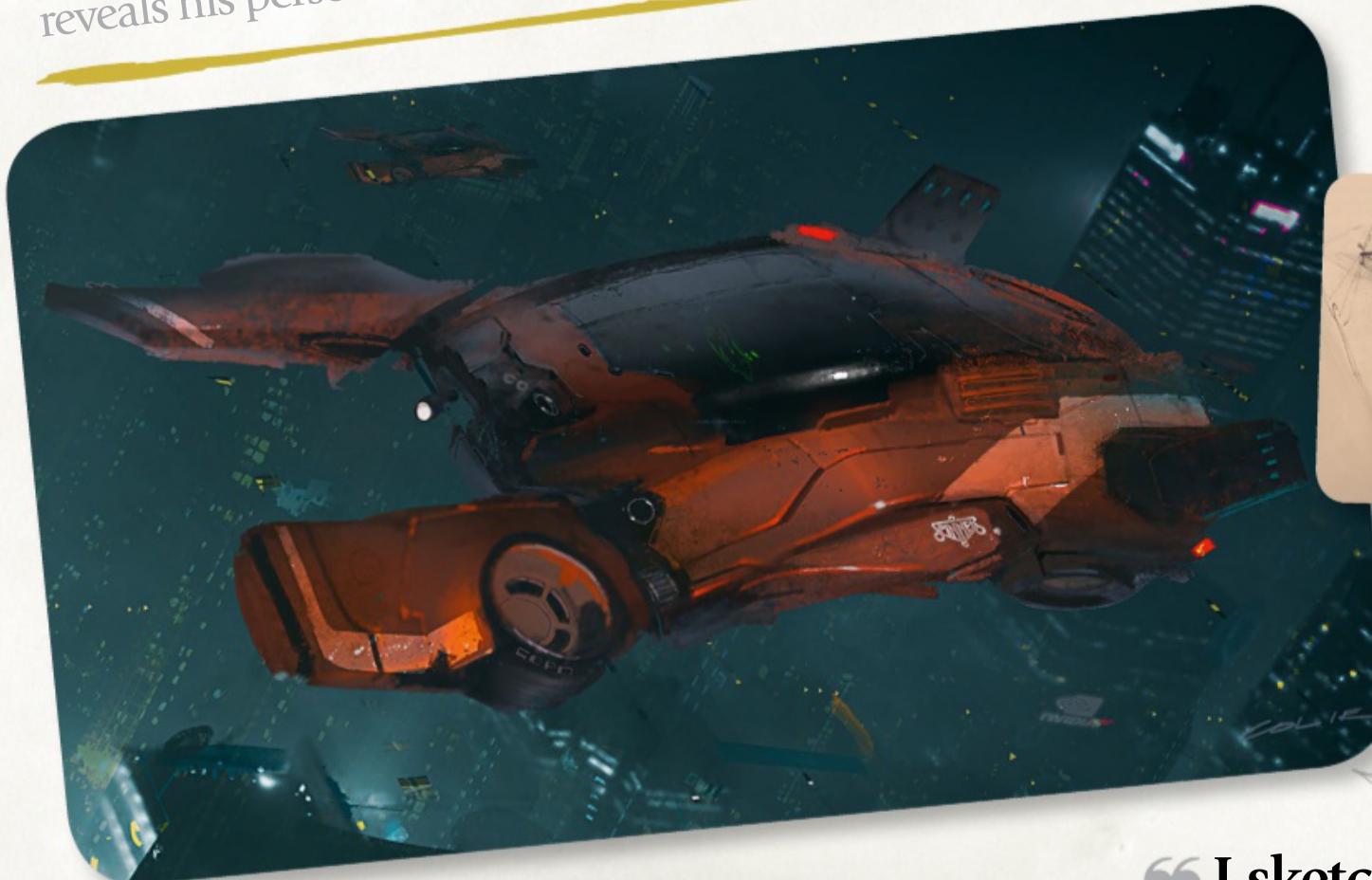
PRINCESS OF FRANCE

A freelance illustration Donglu
carried out for an RPG card game
published by Applibot.

sketchbook

Colie Wertz

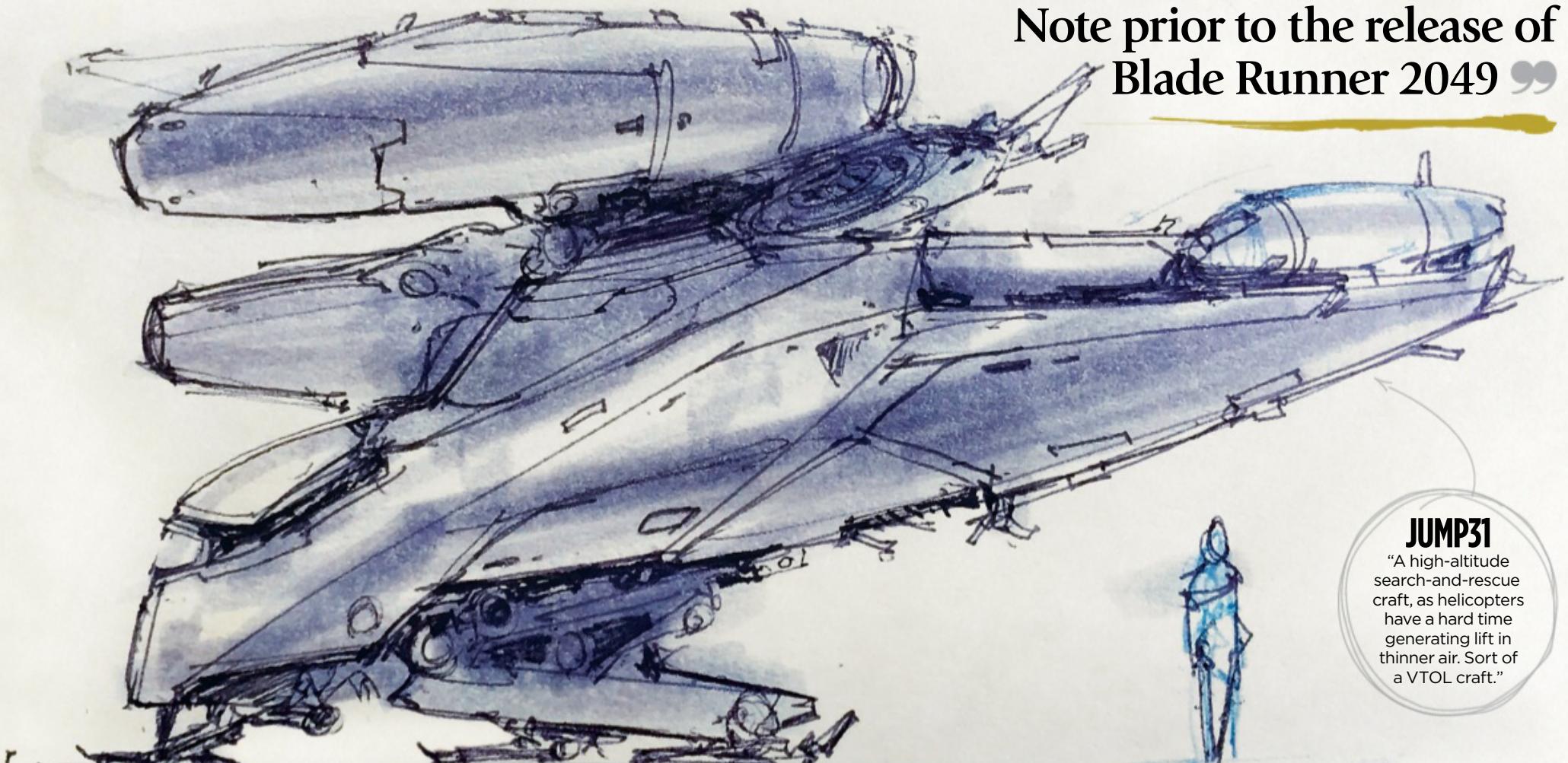
The concept artist who's worked on numerous big-budget films reveals his personal sketches, which often start off as Post-it doodles



SPINNER

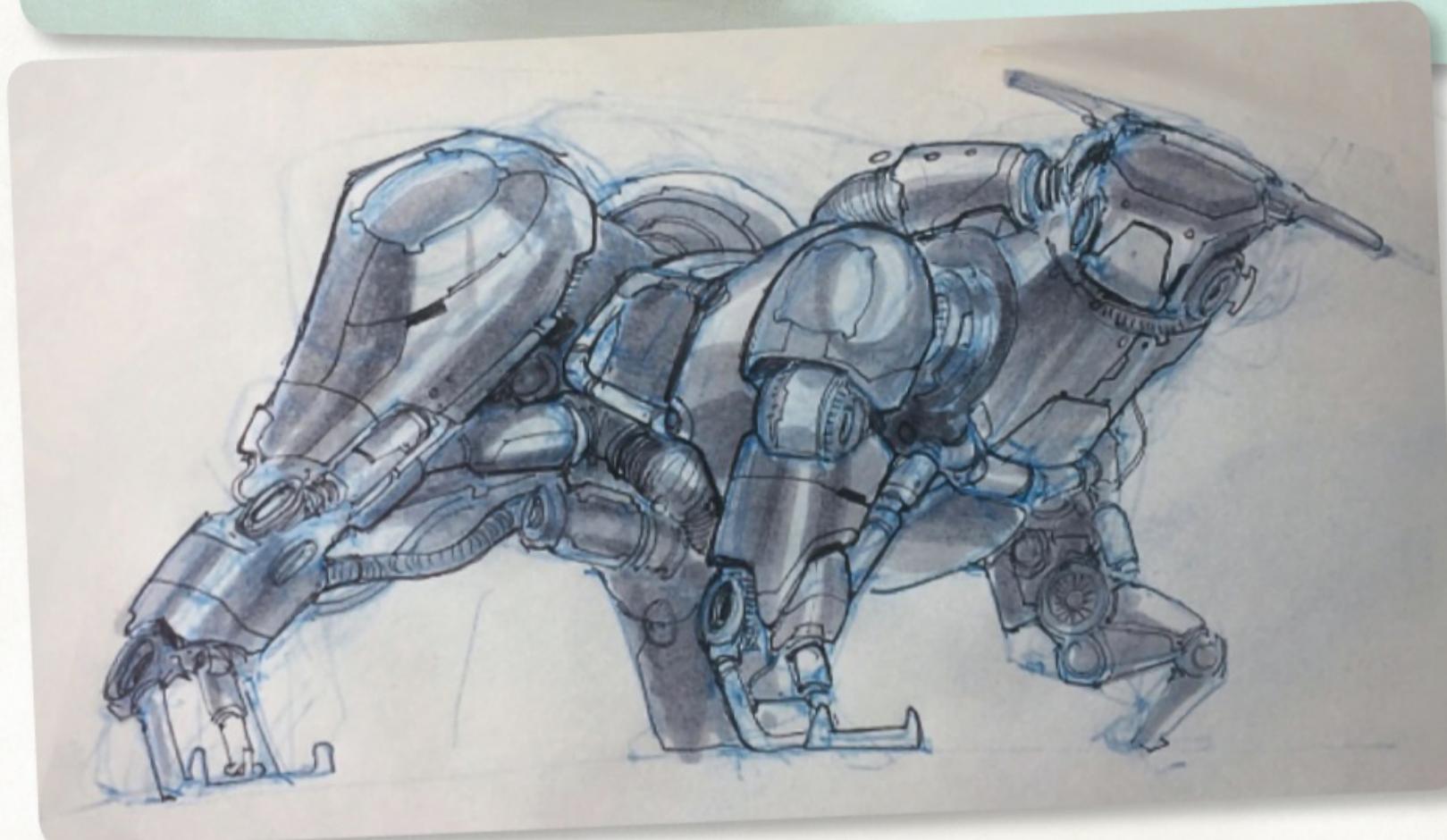
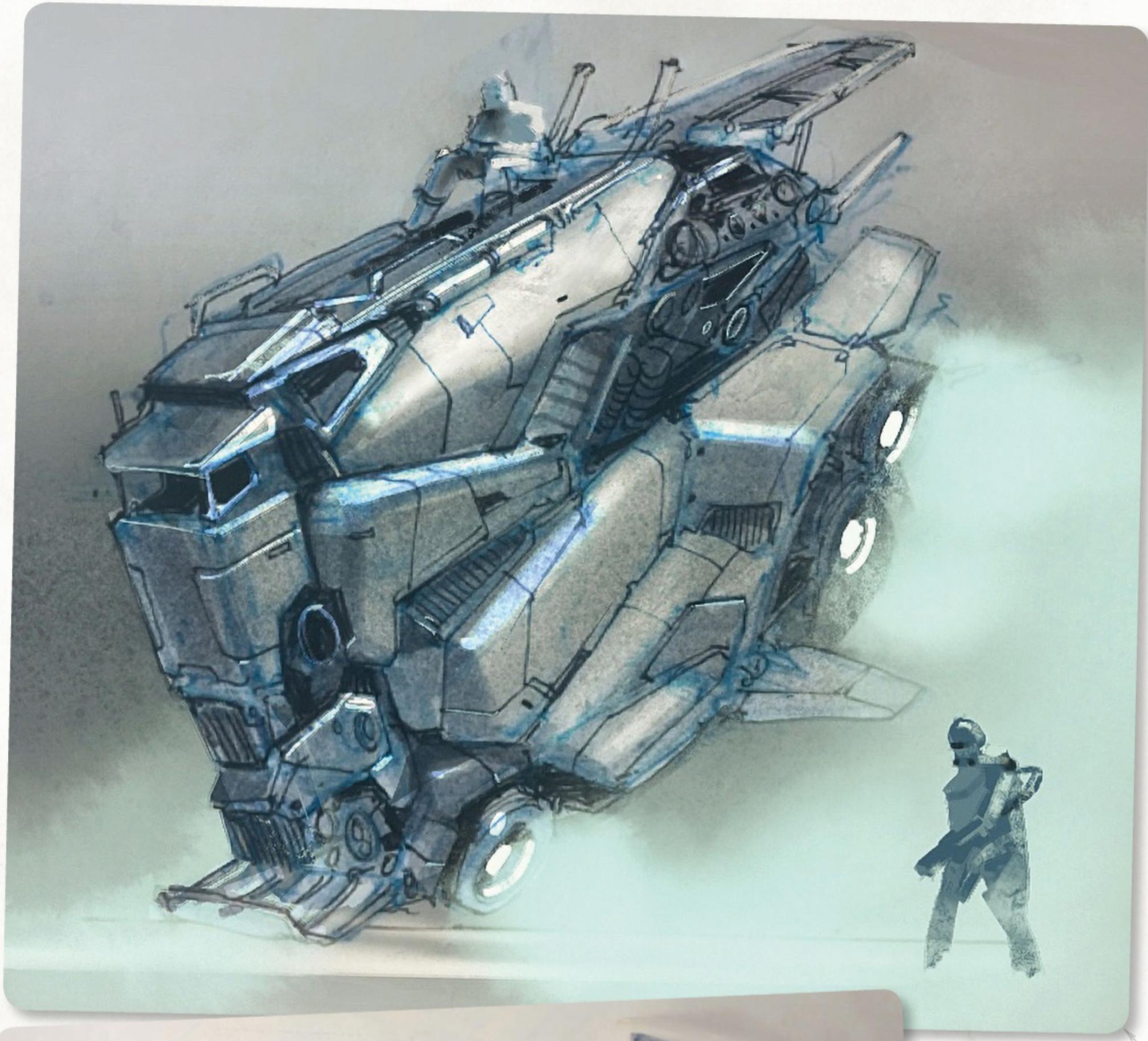
"I sketched this on a Post-it Note prior to the release of Blade Runner 2049 a few years ago. Most of the painting was done with my finger in Procreate Pocket on my iPhone 6, with some finishing touches in Procreate on my iPad."

“I sketched this on a Post-it Note prior to the release of Blade Runner 2049”



JUMP31

"A high-altitude search-and-rescue craft, as helicopters have a hard time generating lift in thinner air. Sort of a VTOL craft."



STREETSWEeper

"Leaving your car parked on the wrong side of the road on street-cleaning day with this crew could prove hazardous to your vehicle's health. They wouldn't even give you a ticket. A pencil sketch that was finished in Procreate."

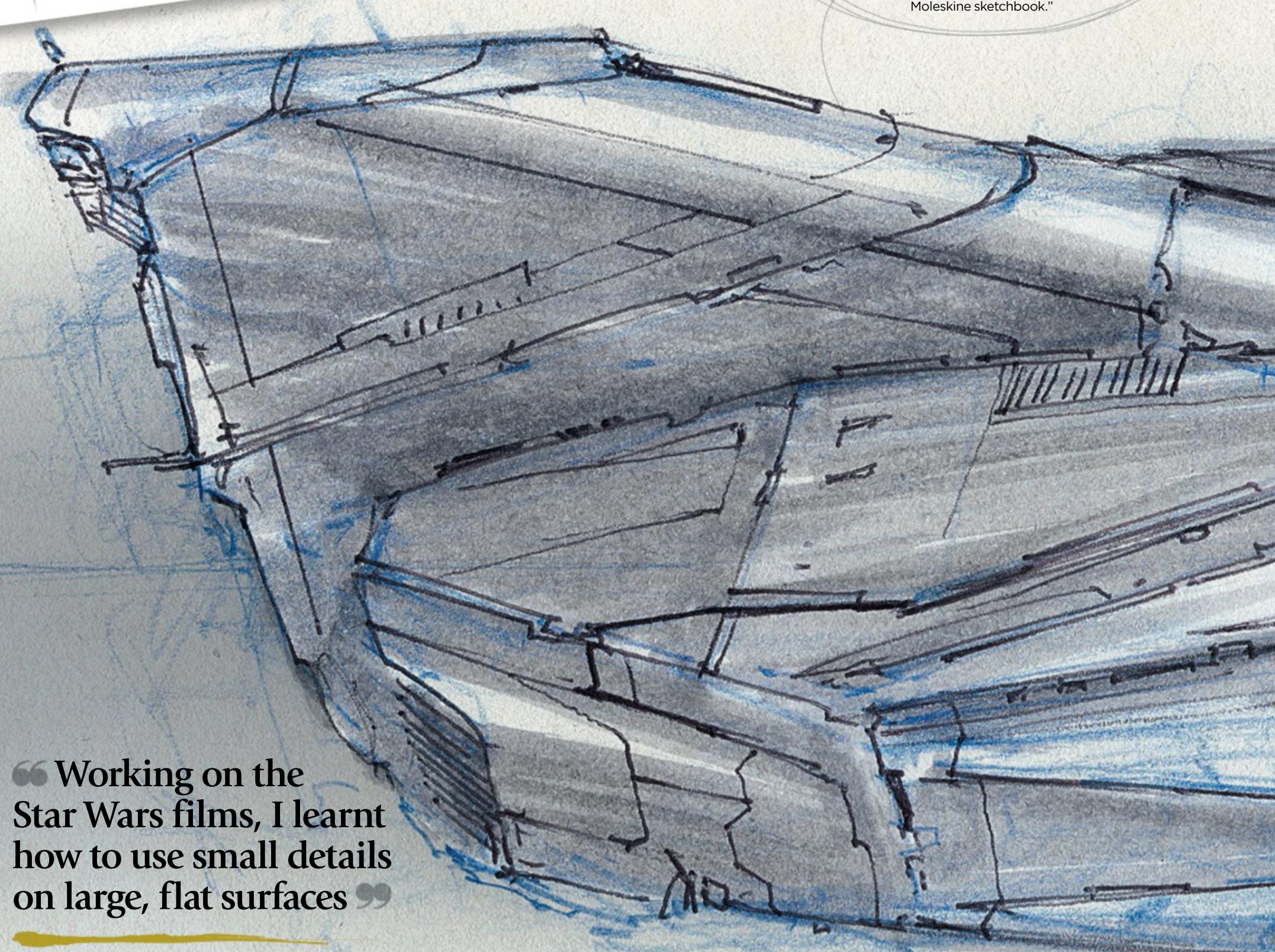
KUKADOG

"A sentry that patrols the perimeters of unmanned cryptocurrency facilities in Iceland."

Sketchbook

DROPCRUISER

"A dropship that can be used in a planet's atmosphere. One of my favourite ship designs is the Raven from the film Elysium. I loved how it flew about on Earth and then went up to the eponymous space station when needed. This was done with a pencil, a ballpoint, and a Tombow marker in a Moleskine sketchbook."

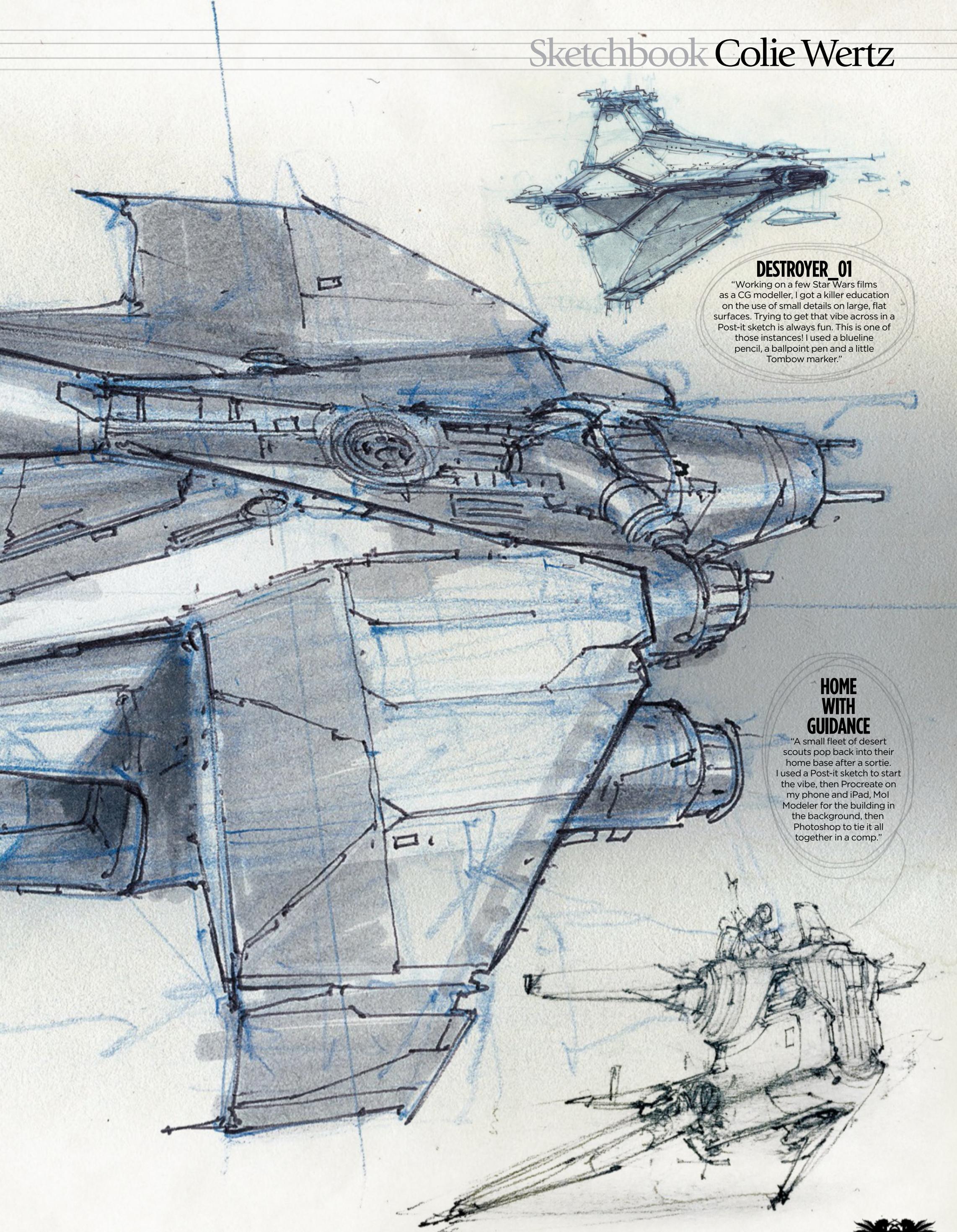


“Working on the Star Wars films, I learnt how to use small details on large, flat surfaces”

SIT THIS ONE OUT

"A pilot decides that hanging out on the roof of his swing-wing vehicle is worth more than a mission."





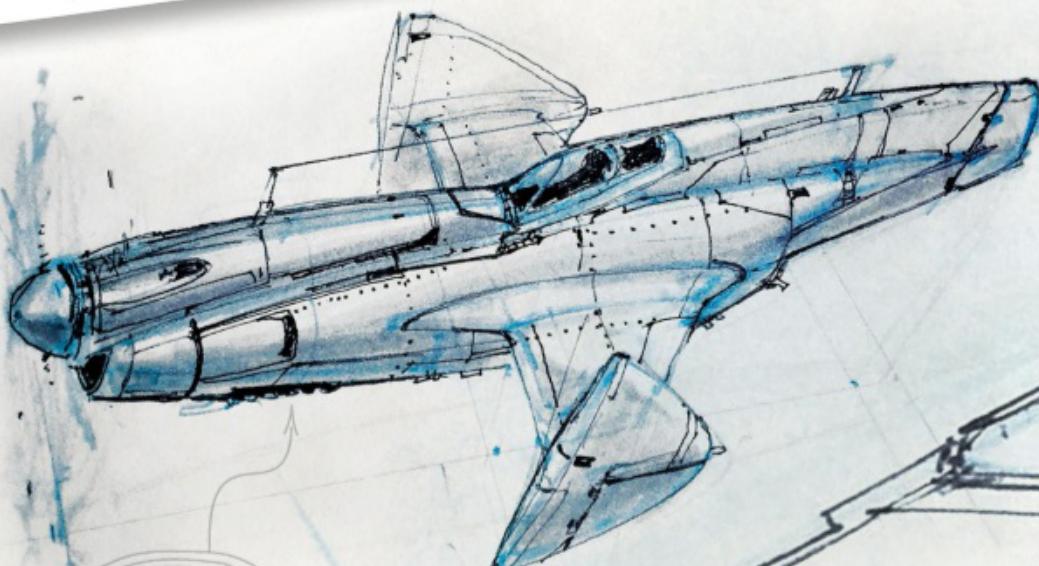
DESTROYER_01

"Working on a few Star Wars films as a CG modeller, I got a killer education on the use of small details on large, flat surfaces. Trying to get that vibe across in a Post-it sketch is always fun. This is one of those instances! I used a blueline pencil, a ballpoint pen and a little Tombow marker."

HOME WITH GUIDANCE

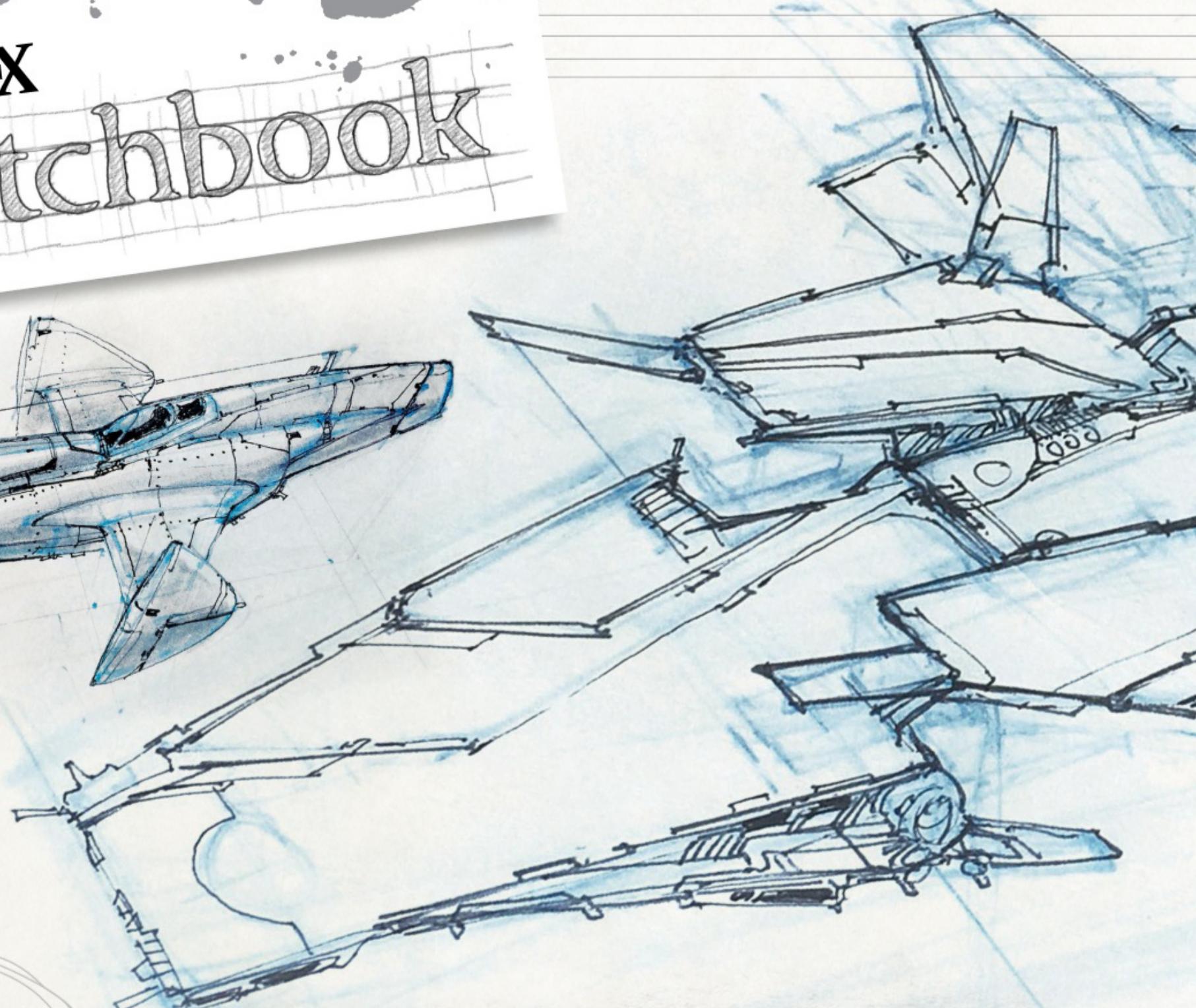
"A small fleet of desert scouts pop back into their home base after a sortie. I used a Post-it sketch to start the vibe, then Procreate on my phone and iPad, Mol Modeler for the building in the background, then Photoshop to tie it all together in a comp."

Sketchbook



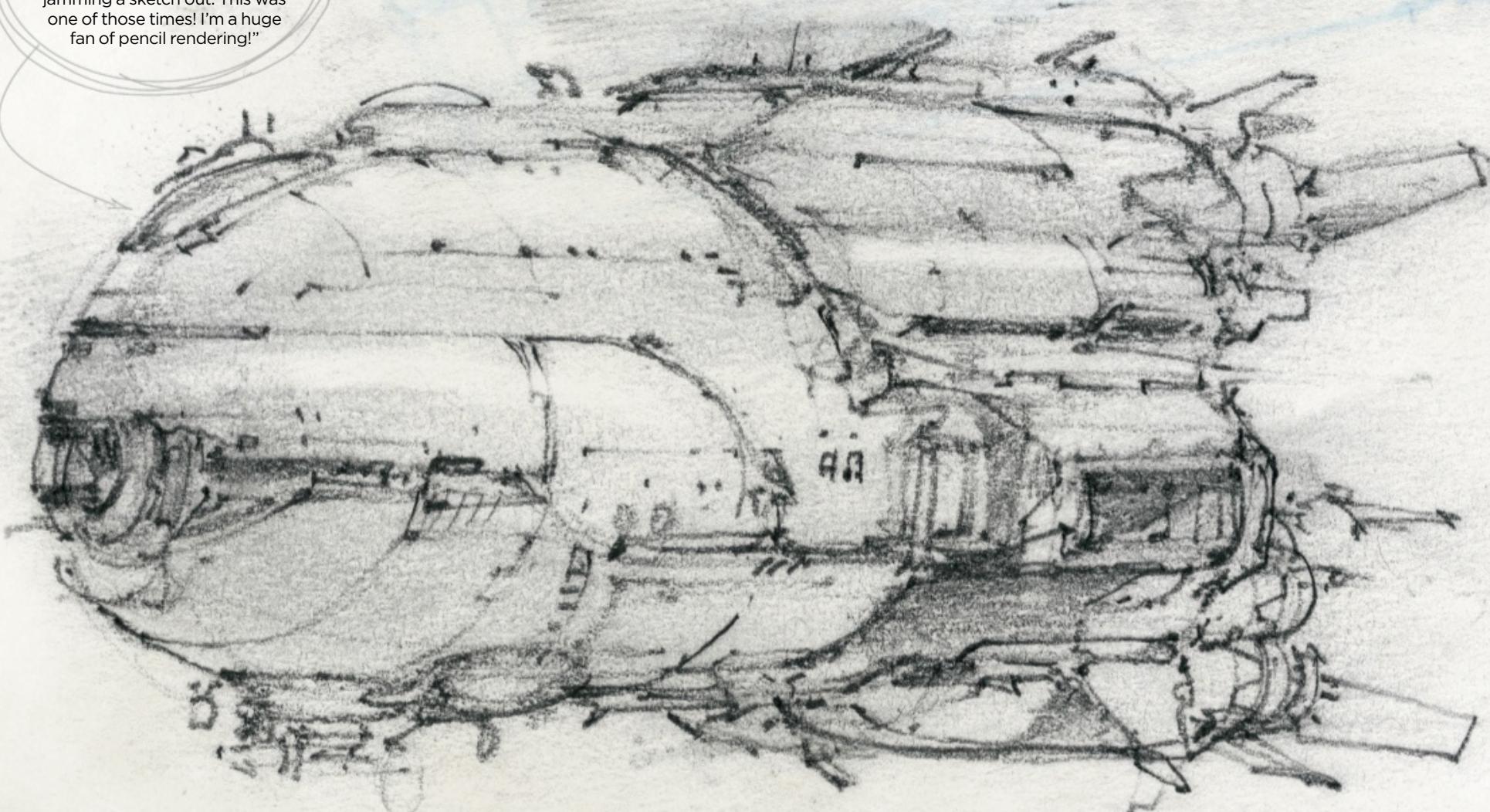
MIG-X3

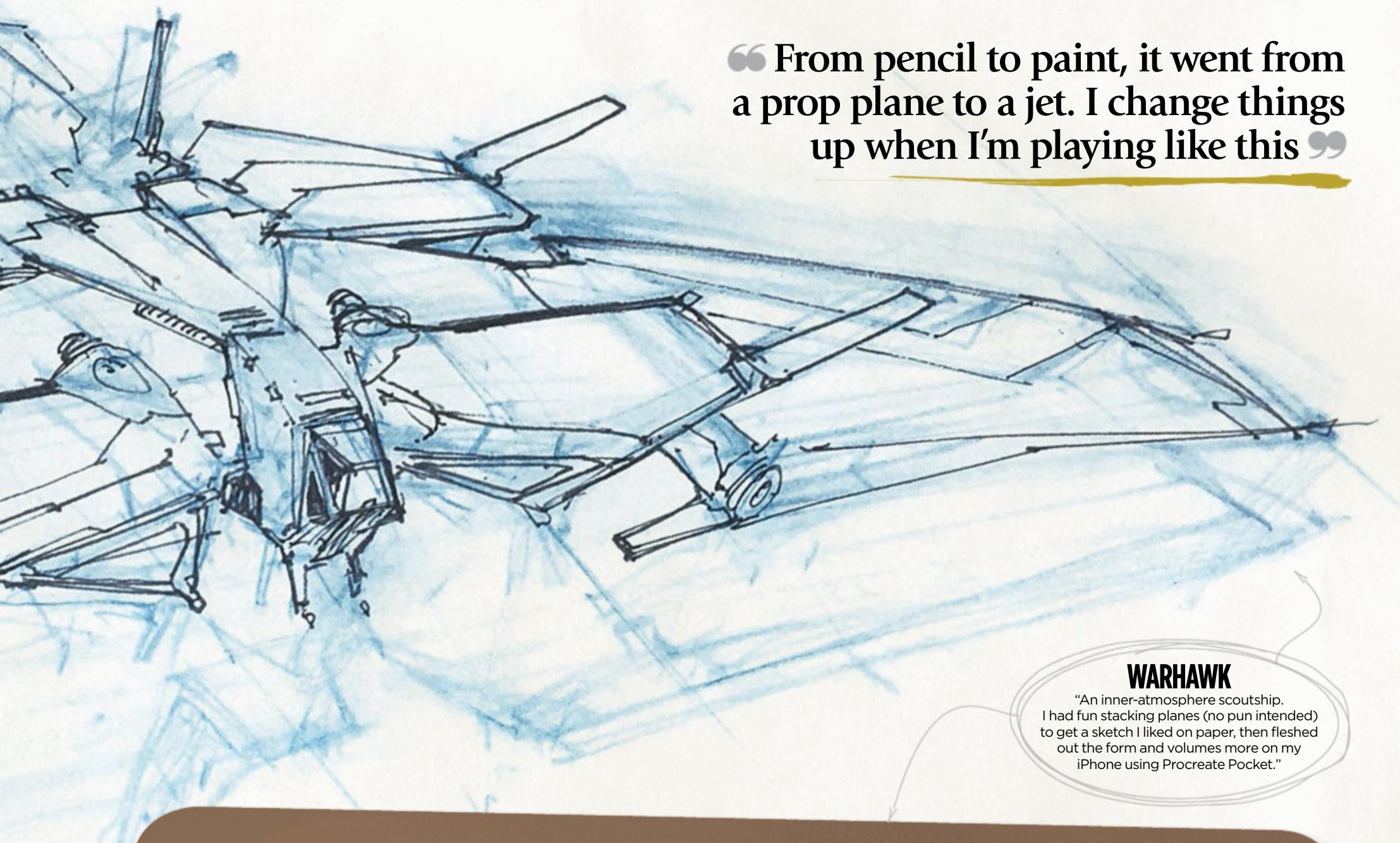
"An experimental plane from the near future, developed by a subsidiary of the Russian Mikoyan company. From pencil to paint, it went from a prop plane to a jet. I let myself change things up when I'm playing like this."



DOMEFRONT

"A pencil sketch on a Post-it Note. Sometimes, when I open extra-large models in Maya or are rendering, I'll spend that time jamming a sketch out. This was one of those times! I'm a huge fan of pencil rendering!"

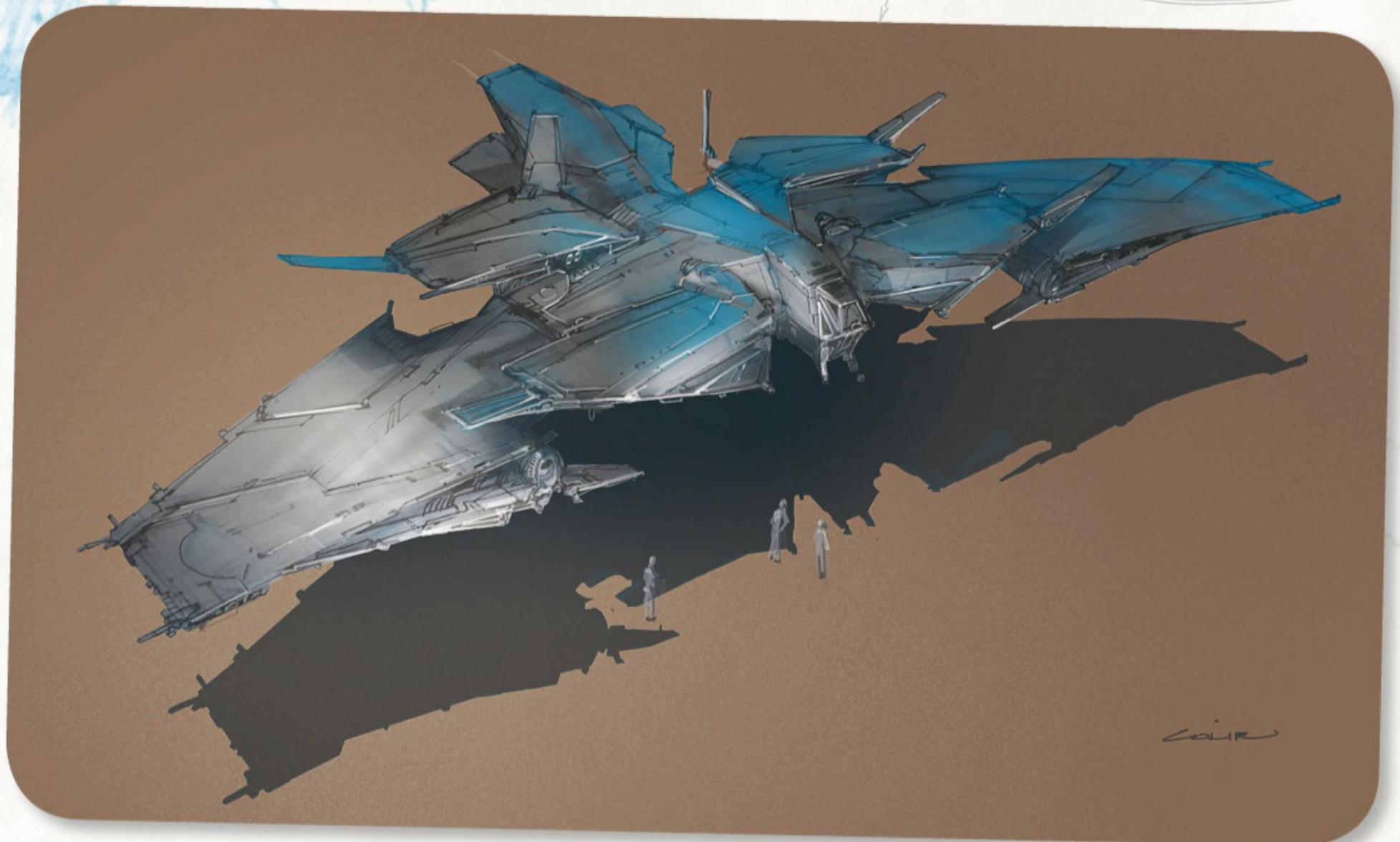




“From pencil to paint, it went from a prop plane to a jet. I change things up when I’m playing like this”

WARHAWK

“An inner-atmosphere scoutship. I had fun stacking planes (no pun intended) to get a sketch I liked on paper, then fleshed out the form and volumes more on my iPhone using Procreate Pocket.”



Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to sketchbook@imaginefx.com

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Kim Jung Gi's exclusive art graces the cover of our drawing skills issue, which also features pro advice on using ArtRage and SketchBook, an interview with Timothy Von Rueden, and Finnian MacManus' sketchbook.



Issue 177

September 2019

We've got plenty of character concept advice this issue, from Aleksey Baydakov who painted the circus duo on the cover, to Serge Birault's pro insights on character concepts. Plus: artists reveal how they use references.



Issue 176

August 2019

Chantal Horeis' gorgeous cover art is your gateway to interviews with JAW Cooper and Bastien Lecouffe Deharne, workshops on Procreate's new text tools and abstract mark-making, plus we reveal alternatives to Photoshop.



Issue 175

July 2019

Learn the art skills you need to break into the animation industry with pro advice on character art, lighting keys, portfolio work and visual development. Elsewhere, we talk to Florian Satzinger, and artist and animator Aaron Blaise.

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November 2019

ImagineFX





ARTIST PORTFOLIO

IAN MCQUE

Garrick Webster learns how the boyhood fan of Ralph McQuarrie made his name in video games and is now living his dream as a Hollywood concept artist



IAN MCQUE

MOVING CITIES

The fantastical, post-apocalyptic world of Philip Reeve's Mortal Engines envisaged in Ian McQue's concept art.

Interview



STAYING AFLOAT

Fully shaded and coloured, this floating tug typifies Ian's personal aesthetic.

Curse of the concept artist!" laughs Ian McQue. "Without wishing to sound mysterious, I can't really talk about what I'm working on at the moment, but I'm just finishing up on two movies and there's some ongoing creative consultancy work on a game. Oh, and I'm just kicking off a big personal project which I hope to announce soon."

Well, there goes our scoop, but optimism is exuding from one of the UK's leading concept artists as he updates us on his work. Having started

his career at DMA Design Ltd, which later became Rockstar North, Ian is known in the world of computer gaming for his concept art work on a slew of Grand Theft Auto titles, going back to the very first one in 1997. Back then the game was a top-down gangland driving game, which Ian helped evolve into the cinematic franchise we know today through titles like GTA: San Andreas (2004), where he was lead character artist, and GTA: The Ballad of Gay Tony (2009), on which he served as concept artist.

CULTURAL IMPACT

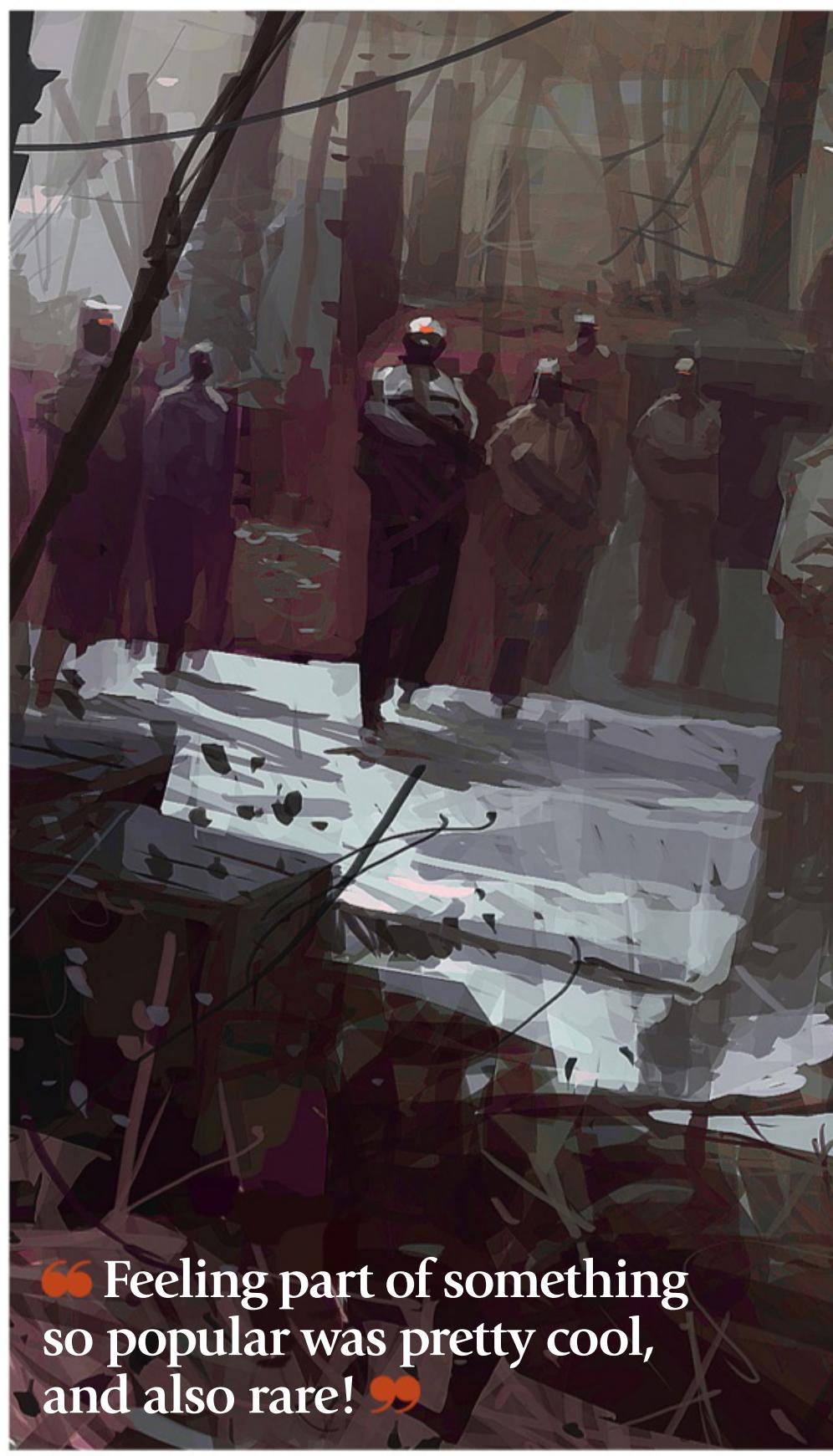
"Working on the GTA franchise as a whole was obviously a significant part of my career, but it was with GTA IV: The Lost and the Damned that I felt we'd created something that had a cultural impact outside of the games world," says Ian. "Being a big deal in the global media environment brought added pressure on subsequent releases, but feeling part of something so popular was pretty cool, and also rare!"

While working on the Grand Theft Auto franchise has had a hugely ➤



GASBAG & GONDOLA

Would you like to take a cruise?
Concept art for the 2018 film
Mortal Engines.



“Feeling part of something so popular was pretty cool, and also rare!”

Artist PROFILE

Ian McQue

LOCATION: Scotland

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: John Blockley, Ron Cobb, Joan Eardley, Chris Foss, Brian Froud, William Heath Robinson, Alan Lee, Ralph McQuarrie, Syd Mead, Mike Mignola, Hayao Miyazaki, Moebius, Arthur Rackham, Shaun Tan, Tatsuyuki Tanaka, Sergio Toppi, John William Waterhouse, Andrew Wyeth and Kow Yokoyama

MEDIA: Pencils, paper, Photoshop
WEB: www.instagram.com/ianmcque

IAN MCQUE



Interview



START YOUR ENGINES

Mortal Engines was an ambitious futuristic movie that took up 18 months of Ian McQue's life

Going freelance has led to Ian McQue shifting from games concept art to cinematic productions, and one of his favourite projects has been Mortal Engines, a Peter Jackson film based on the books by Philip Reeve. Ian was initially contacted in 2015 and ended up working on concept art for the movie for about 18 months, spending six of them in New Zealand.

"I lived my time there, made some great friends and hung out with some of my Weta heroes," he says. "It was my first real experience of how movies are made so I was a bit wet behind the ears going in, but learned a heck of a lot."

A post-apocalyptic revenge thriller with ravenous mobile predator cities, attack robots and cyberpunk airships, the movie was the ideal playground for Ian, given his love of designing enormous futuristic vehicles. More than that, his concept work on the film led to Ian being commissioned by Scholastic for a new set of covers for the series of books. "I ended up doing the covers for those and the prequel trilogy along with 40 illustrations for a new book of three short stories, *Night Flights*, also set in that world," he says.

"*Night Flights* is possibly the thing I'm most proud of since going freelance. It was

a real honour to work with Philip Reeve and a stunning-looking book. Book illustration was what I'd wanted to do on leaving art college all those years ago, so it's felt like coming full circle."

As well as on his Instagram, Ian's improbable futuristic vehicles, settings and characters appear in four books of sketches he's published, which include *Robots*, *Mechs*, *Chroma*, and *Ruins & Robots*. In addition, four of his creations have been produced as model kits by Industria Mechanika, enabling you to build *Remora*, *Waldo*, *Wasps* and *Sky Mark* vehicles. More details at www.industriamechanika.com.



GASBAG

Ian's penchant for unlikely looking airships made him an obvious choice to create concept art for the film.



LUX INTERIOR

Ian also created imagery to capture the atmosphere in the Jenny Haniver's cabin.

IAN MCQUE

LONDON CALLING

In the Mortal Engines universe, great predator cities hunt smaller settlements for resources, and Ian helped develop the look of London for the film.



Interview

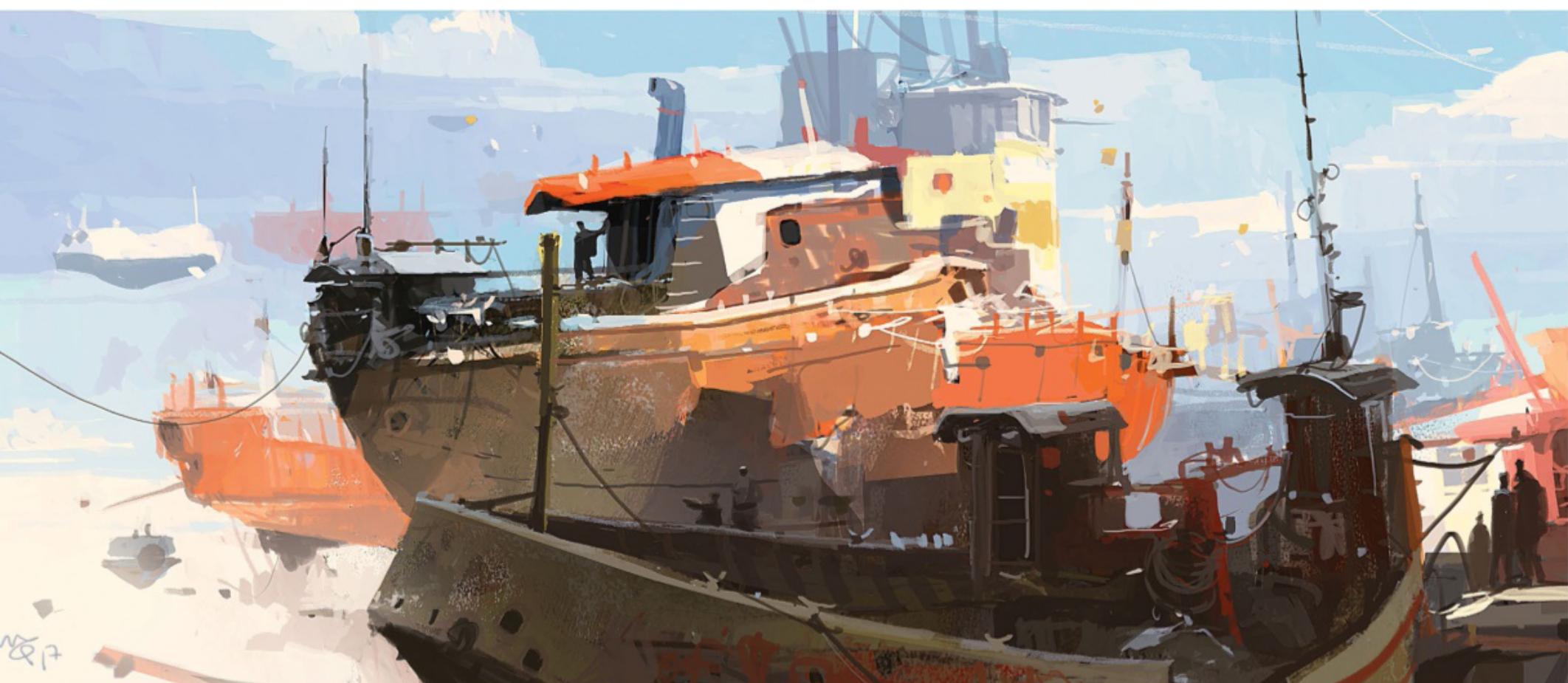
NIGHT FLIGHTS

Ian's wraparound cover artwork for Philip Reeve's recent book of Mortal Engines short stories.

© Scholastic



© Big Robot Ltd



► significant impact on Ian's career, since leaving Rockstar in 2014 a whole world of opportunities has opened up to the Sunderland-born, Edinburgh-based artist.

One of his biggest and personally most satisfying projects in recent years has been his contribution to the awesome-looking post-apocalyptic film *Mortal Engines* (2018), based on the 2002 young adult novel by Philip Reeve. And how could any concept

AIR NAVIGATORS

Ian's own art is inspired by the Sunderland dockyards but floating in uncharted areas of the universe.

artist not love working on a film like *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) – one of the most visually varied productions of the past decade, which received huge critical acclaim?

"Having provided the artwork for the initial pitch I wasn't available when the movie went into full production, but working with Phil Lord and Chris Miller and their production designer Justin K Thompson was an absolute blast," recalls Ian.

"I've worked on a few things with those guys now and it's always great fun, but being connected to something as awesome as *Spider-Verse* turned out to be special. I'll always be grateful to Justin for opening the door to working

in film, which enabled me to take the step into a freelance career."

RENEGADE ROBOT FUN

Then there's the 2017 game *The Signal* from Tölva, praised for its artistic style. It's another important project for Ian because the look and feel of his personal artwork helped inspire the game itself. Deep in the future, a hacker hijacks a robot and explores the world of Tölva, which comes complete with Ian's own trademark rusting space hulks and renegade droids. This open-world shooter is a must-play for fans of Ian's work.

"Tölva was interesting in that Jim Rossignol, head of Big Robot Ltd,

“Connected to something as awesome as *Spider-Verse* turned out to be special”

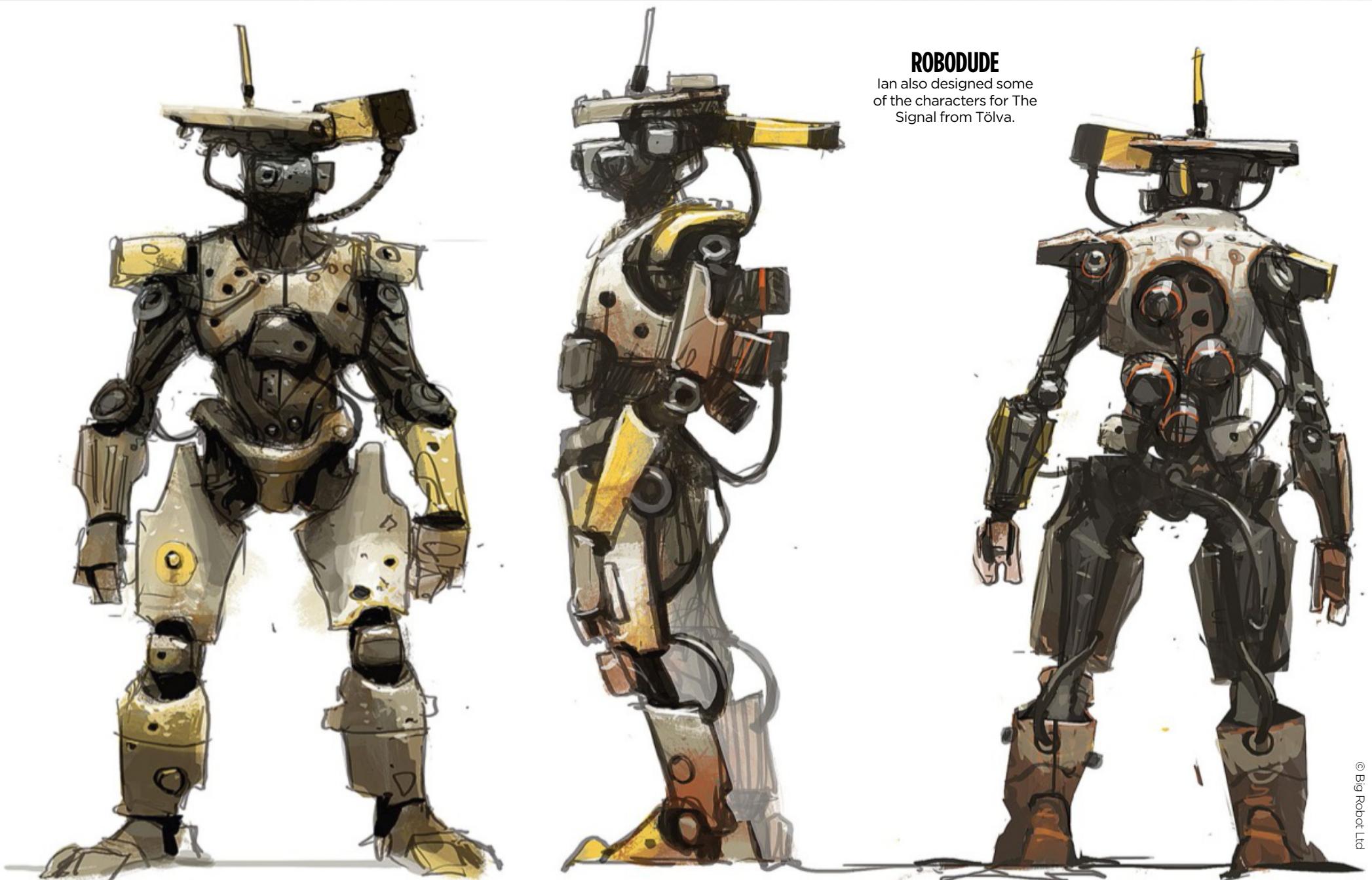
THE SIGNAL FROM TÖLVA

An environment concept for the computer game based on Ian's distinctive style of painting.



ROBODUDE

Ian also designed some of the characters for The Signal from Tölvä.



© Big Robot Ltd

Interview

REMORA

The largest of the four models based on Ian's designs, Remora is a 1:35 scale replica of an imaginary airship.



FROM SHIPYARDS TO SPACE HULKS

How Ian McQue's personal work has become a creative industry of its own...

Now based in Scotland, Ian McQue grew up in Sunderland, once home to some of the UK's biggest shipyards. Although not aware of it at the time, seeing massive hulls being prepared down on the docks would have a profound effect on Ian as an artist. "It wasn't until I began posting my personal work online that all this rusty industrial stuff came pouring out," he says.

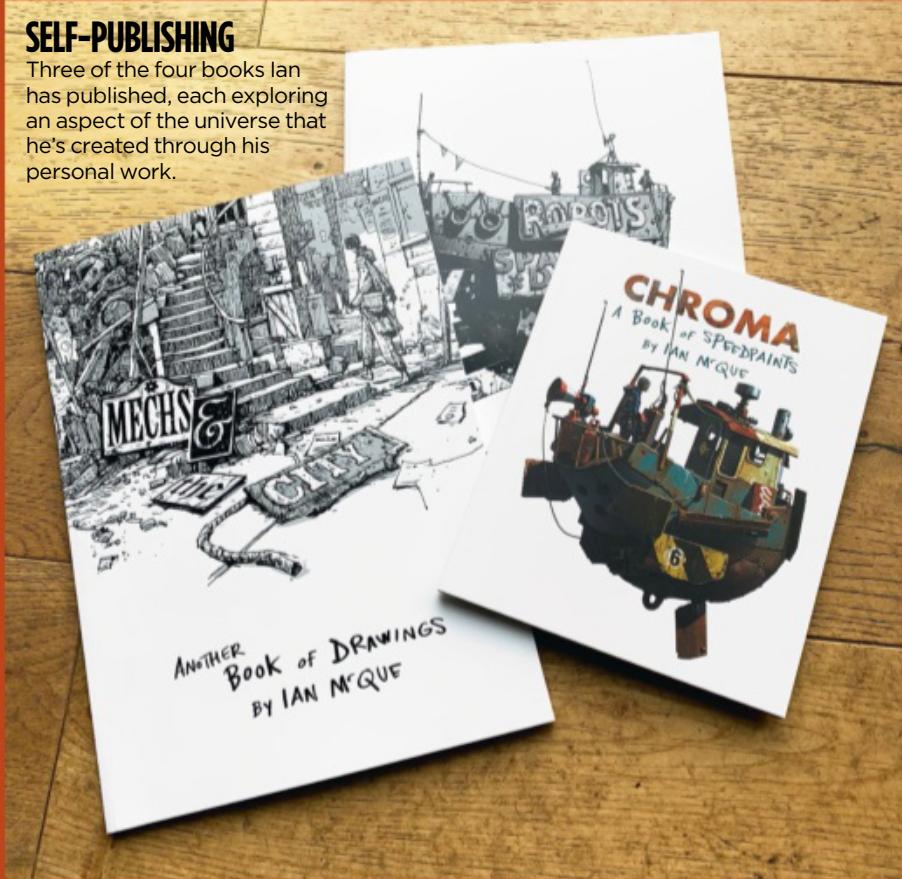
"All of these ideas must have been lurking about in the back of my mind, waiting for an opportunity to show themselves."

Inspired early on by the 'used universe' look of Star Wars, and even more by the deep-space settings seen in Alien, Ian has built up his own universe featuring gargantuan space hulks levitating over complex, futuristic landscapes.

"I think it's the dynamic quality and pent-up energy apparent in an object which is clearly too heavy to float, that intrigues me. There's an immediate narrative underscoring these images too, which is something you're always on the look-out for as a concept artist. How does that work, what sort of world can that exist in, and who pilots these things?"

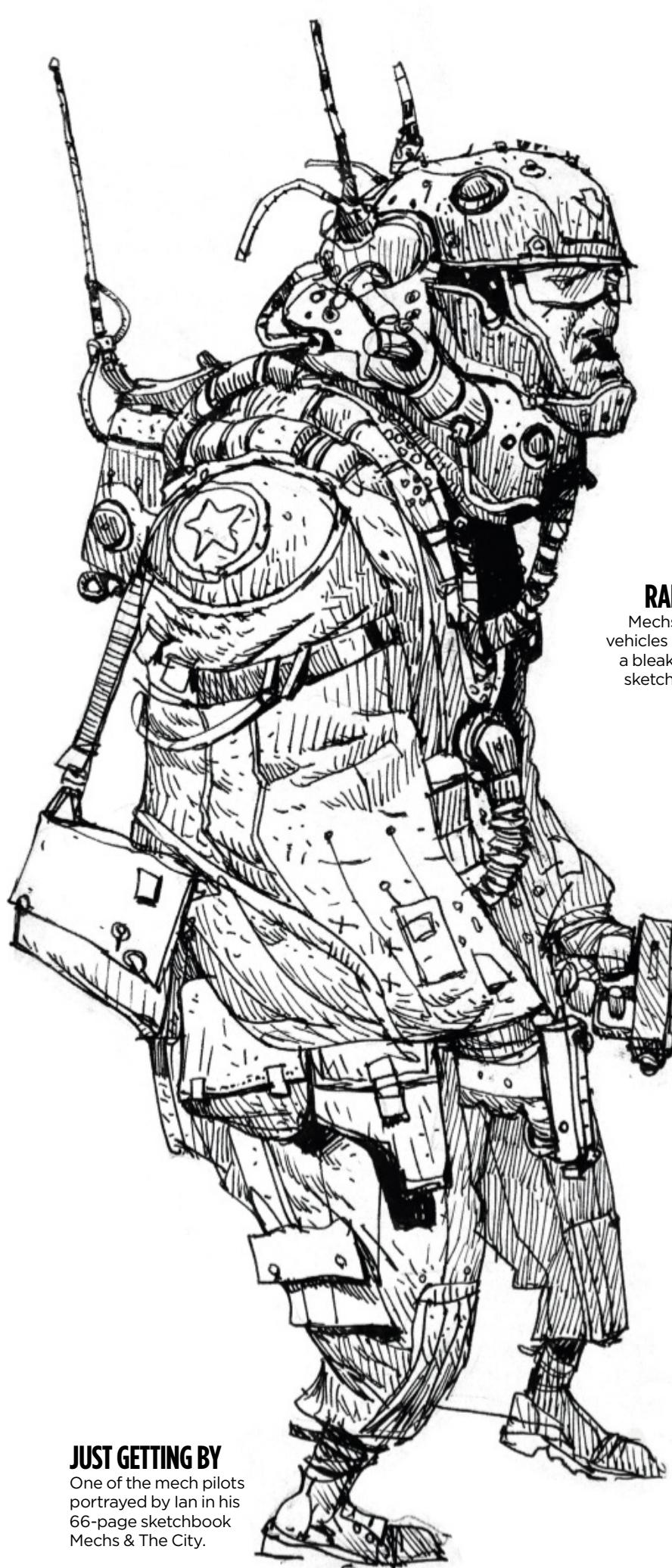
SELF-PUBLISHING

Three of the four books Ian has published, each exploring an aspect of the universe that he's created through his personal work.



WALDO

The Waldo model is a good starting point for fans, produced in collaboration with Industria Mechanika.

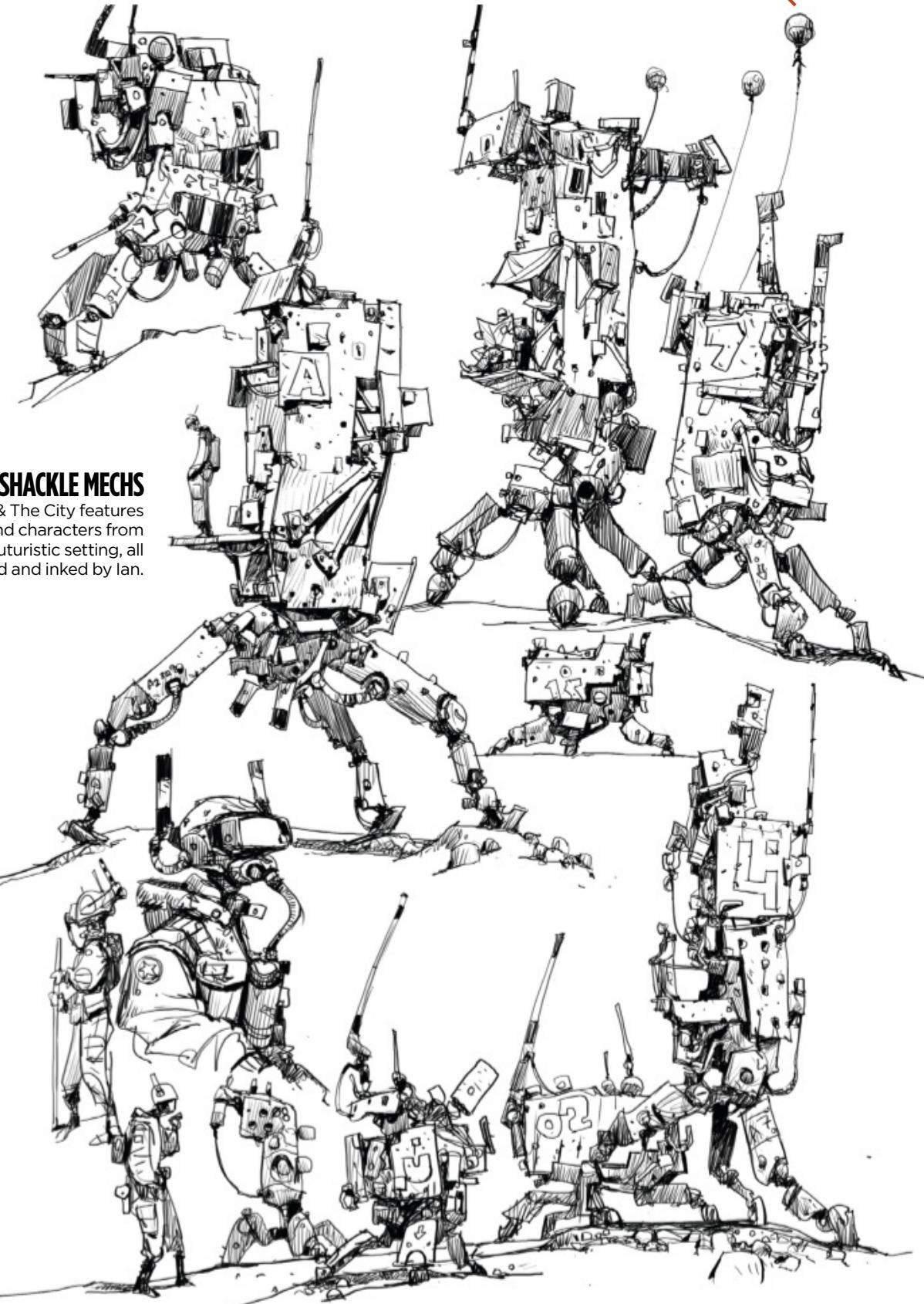
**JUST GETTING BY**

One of the mech pilots portrayed by Ian in his 66-page sketchbook *Mechs & The City*.

» was keen to make a game that looked as close as possible to my particular aesthetic, even down to trying to replicate my brushstrokes in the textures," he explains. "Although I didn't play a huge part in Tölvä's development, it was good to be involved in making a sci-fi game. It's the closest a game has come to capturing what I have in my head, certainly. So far, at least."

ART THAT'S FULL OF DETAILS

The way The Signal from Tölvä reflects the texture of Ian's artwork really takes us to the heart of his talent and his process. As seen in the art books he's published, Ian is an accomplished sketcher and meticulous with detail.

**RAMSHACKLE MECHS**

Mechs & The City features vehicles and characters from a bleak futuristic setting, all sketched and inked by Ian.

Pencil and paper are where each image begins, sometimes aided by a bit of 3D modelling if the piece requires complex lighting or has an unusual perspective.

After that, it's into Photoshop, often painting with Kyle Webster's brushes, which are perfect for giving his future civilisations a classic, dated feel. Watch

“It’s the closest a game has come to capturing what I have in my head, certainly”

one of his IAMAG Master Classes on YouTube and you'll be able to see just how sophisticated Ian's colouring and shading skills are.

The other facet to his approach is a belief in hard work. The US artist Chuck Close's quote, "Inspiration is for amateurs, the rest of us just show up and get to work," is one of Ian's

mantras. Undoubtedly, the hard graft over the past three decades has taken Ian from being a boy fascinated by Ralph McQuarrie's work on Star Wars to an art graduate who wanted to illustrate books, and on to become a leader in game and film concept art.

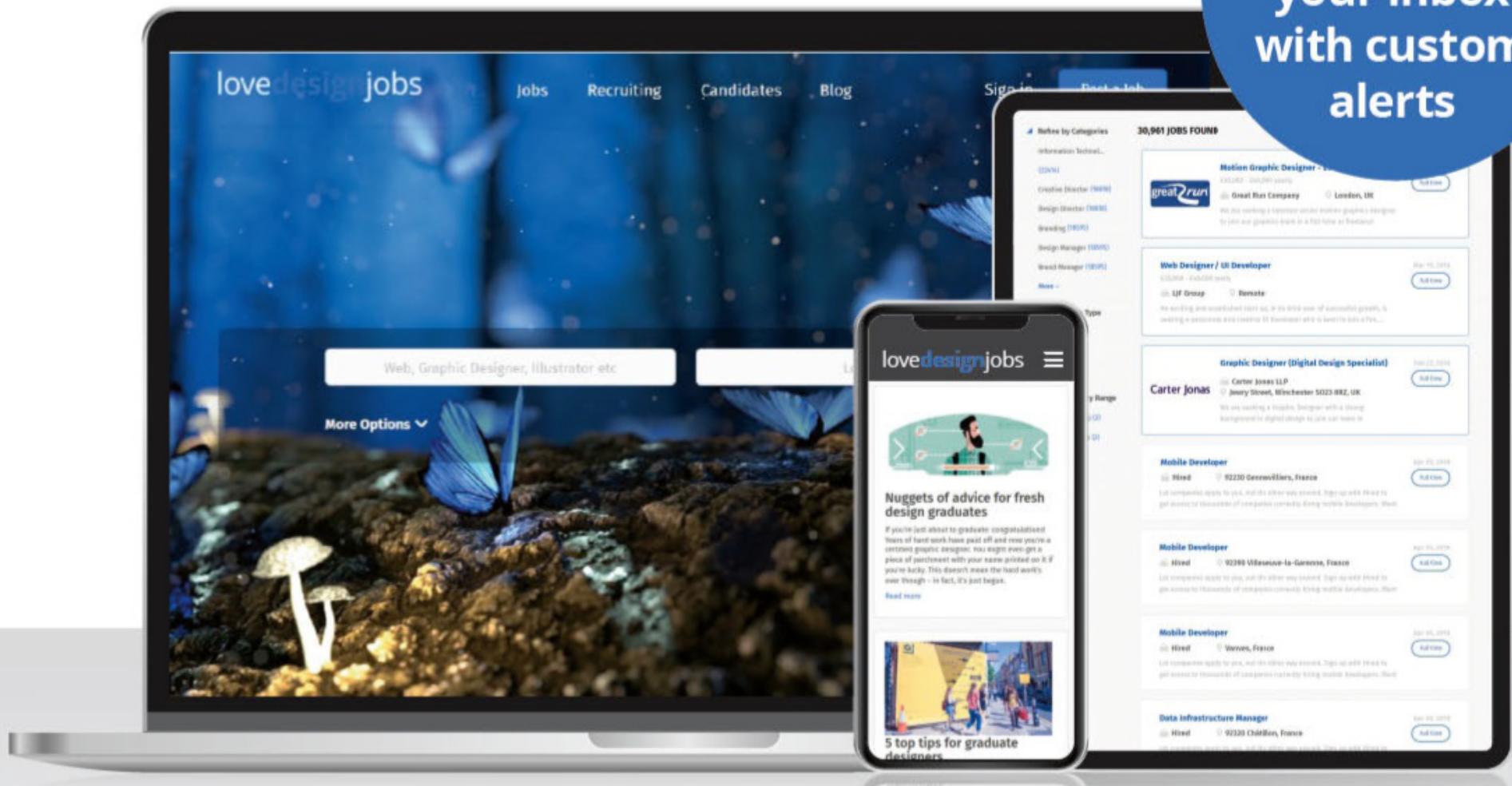
"At 12 years old I knew I wanted to do what Ralph McQuarrie did, but had no idea how," says Ian. "This was long before concept art had become the industry it is now. And living in Sunderland in the days before the internet, I never imagined I'd be able to work in the film industry."

"Hollywood may as well have been on another planet, such was my distance from it. But eventually the internet was invented and a few CGHub front pages later I was getting offers to work as a film concept artist. I finally got that dream job, just 30-something years later than I'd hoped! I guess the lesson is: never give up."

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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

64 Become a better concept artist

Learn how Sparth develops his concept art, including his approach to using custom brushes and building texture.

72 Quick concepts using 3D tools

Alex Jay Brady rapidly generates ideas using basic modifiers to melt and then recrystallise 3D models in strange new forms.

78 Core Skills: Krita

Sara Tepes continues her series on the free painting program by taking a tour of Krita's tools and its pared-back workspace.

82 Build a home in virtual reality

Martin Nebelong brings his vision of a wizard's eccentric home to life using Dreams, a virtual reality video game where anything is possible!

Photoshop BECOME A BETTER CONCEPT ARTIST

Gain insights into how **Sparth** creates the signature look for his concepts, including his approach to using custom brushes and building up textures



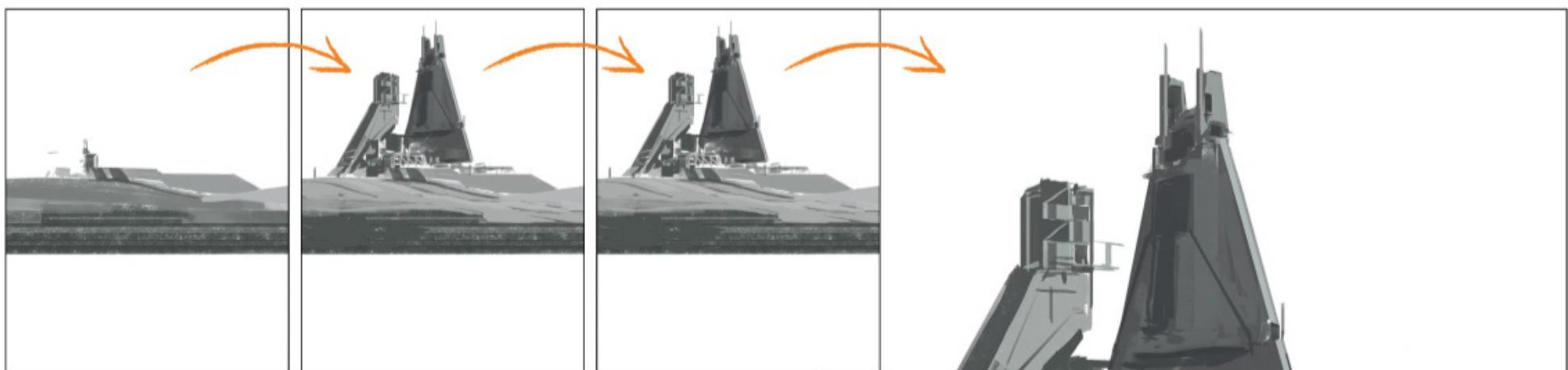
I love everything connected to the crafting of groundbreaking imagery, and I'm always ready to venture into new visual horizons. I've always been passionate about coming up with new digital techniques, and pioneered the use of complex brushes and custom shapes in 2005 and 2010 respectively, as well as venturing into new territories with

virtual reality painting experiments through Tilt Brush and Quill.

For this workshop, I'll explain how taking a minimalist approach to a concept art task emphasises the real-life aspects of the scene. In this painting, which took about four hours to complete, I was keen not to overdo it in terms of sky, details, complexity and number of planes.

Over the coming pages, I'll show you my technique for adding texture

with a specific use of Photoshop's Magic Wand tool; used custom brushes to quickly develop an environment (these brushes are available via the Resources – see page 8); and made use of the software's handy auto correction features (Auto Color, Auto Contrast and Auto Tone) and how I use these to constantly shift my scene towards a more realistic photographic feel. I hope you enjoy it!



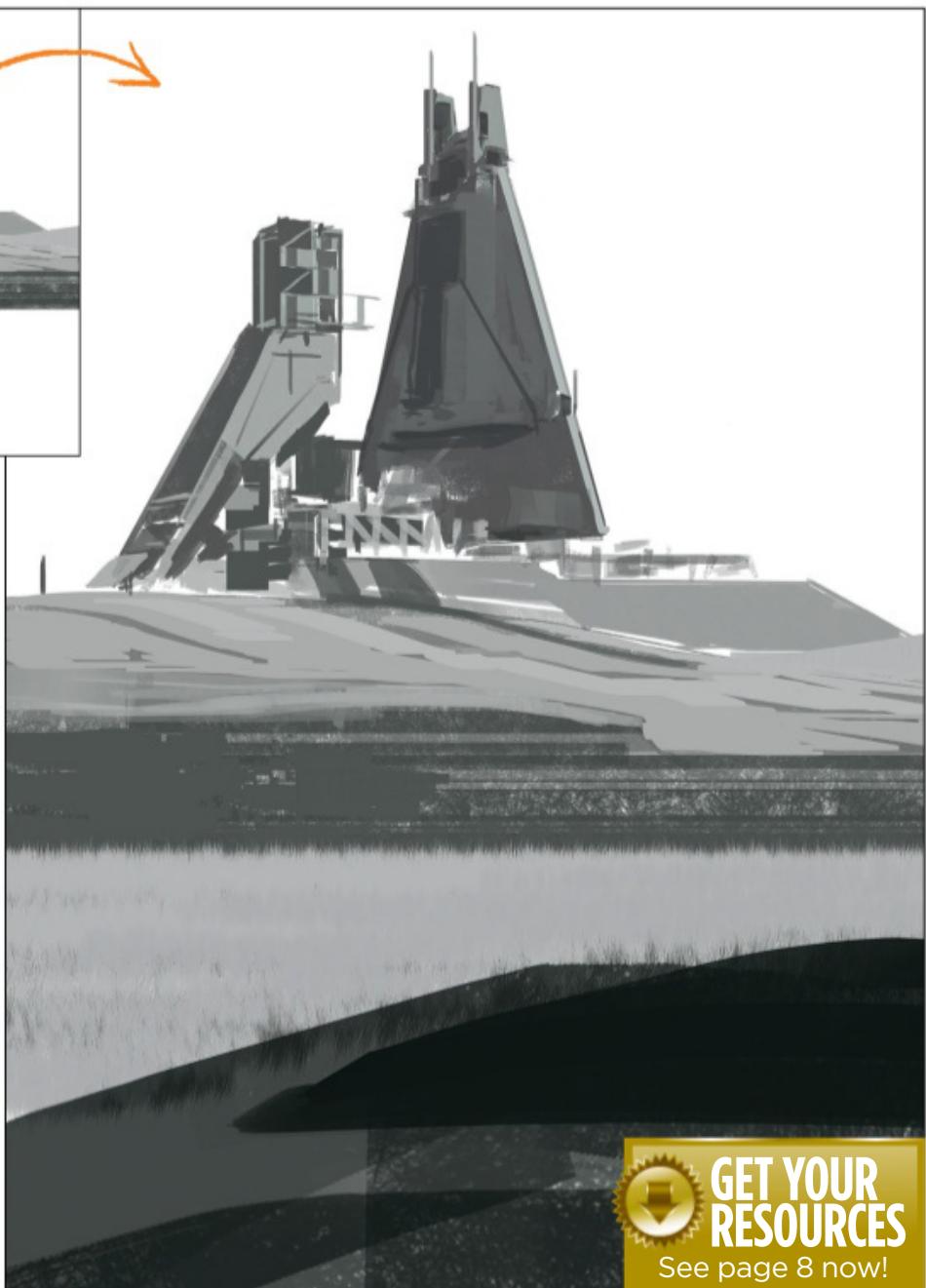
1 Putting down a foundation sketch

I often start a new image with just a vague composition concept in mind, but it's enough to get me making some marks. Some of you may already be familiar with the fact that I nearly always block out my initial composition in a matter of minutes. It's certainly the case with this concept piece.

Here, the first element that you'll notice is the strong horizontal line, which splits the canvas along the lower third. My composition is based on diagonals and implied triangles that will help to energise the flow of the scene. The spaceship, for example, is a large pyramid-like structure. In contrast to vertical and

horizontal lines, diagonals are the purest expression of movement in a composition, and when used correctly help to create dynamism in a painting.

The hue, saturation and colours of my images very often vary from start to finish, because digital tools enable me to generate many variations without significantly altering an image. Composition, however, is a very different matter: you have to nail the image structure and main guiding lines as soon as you have an idea of the story you want to convey. Any late changes to the composition may affect the readability and clarity of your image. So once I'm happy with my base sketch, I try to avoid making composition changes. ➤

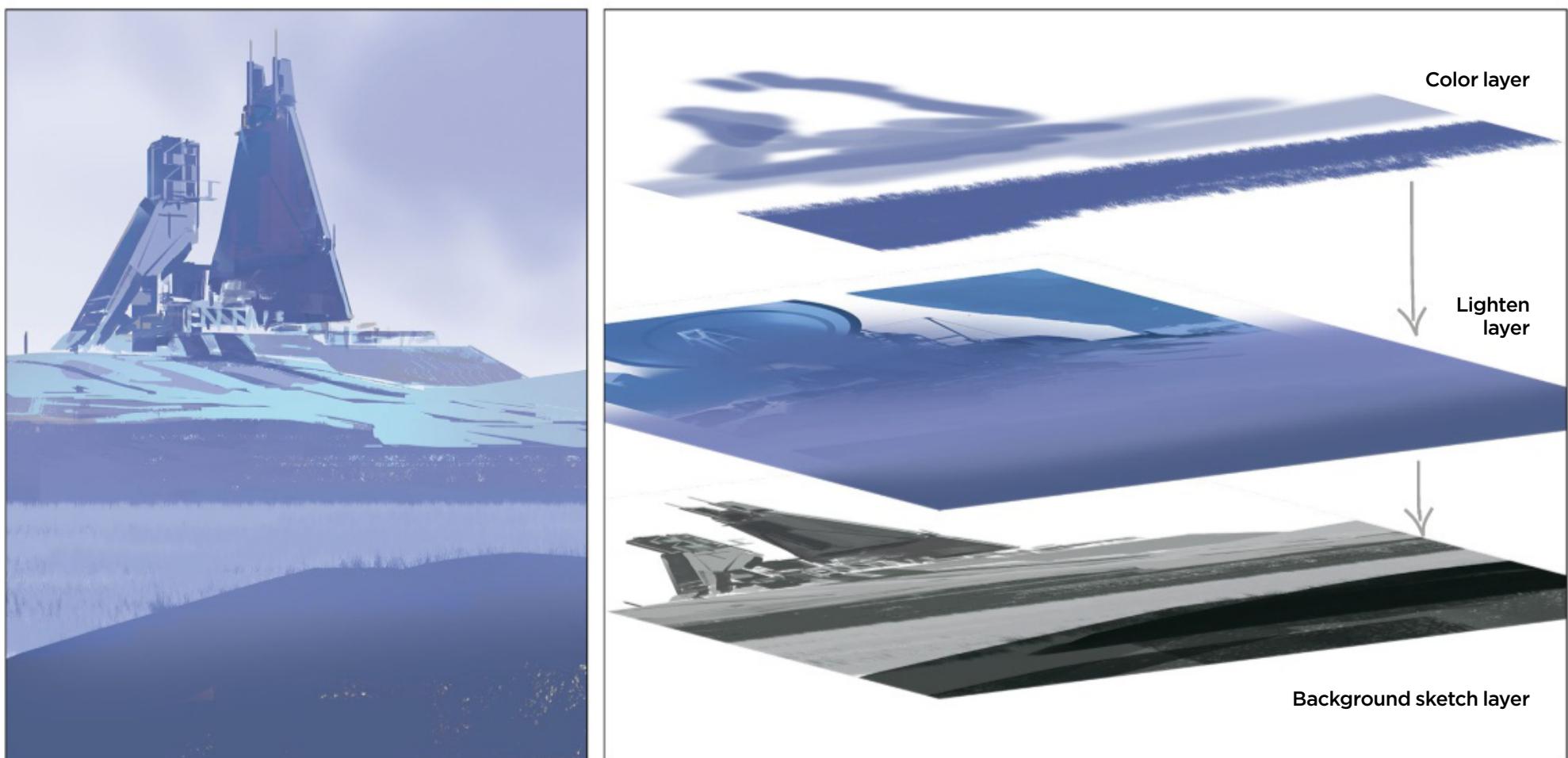


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See page 8 now!

In depth Concept artist



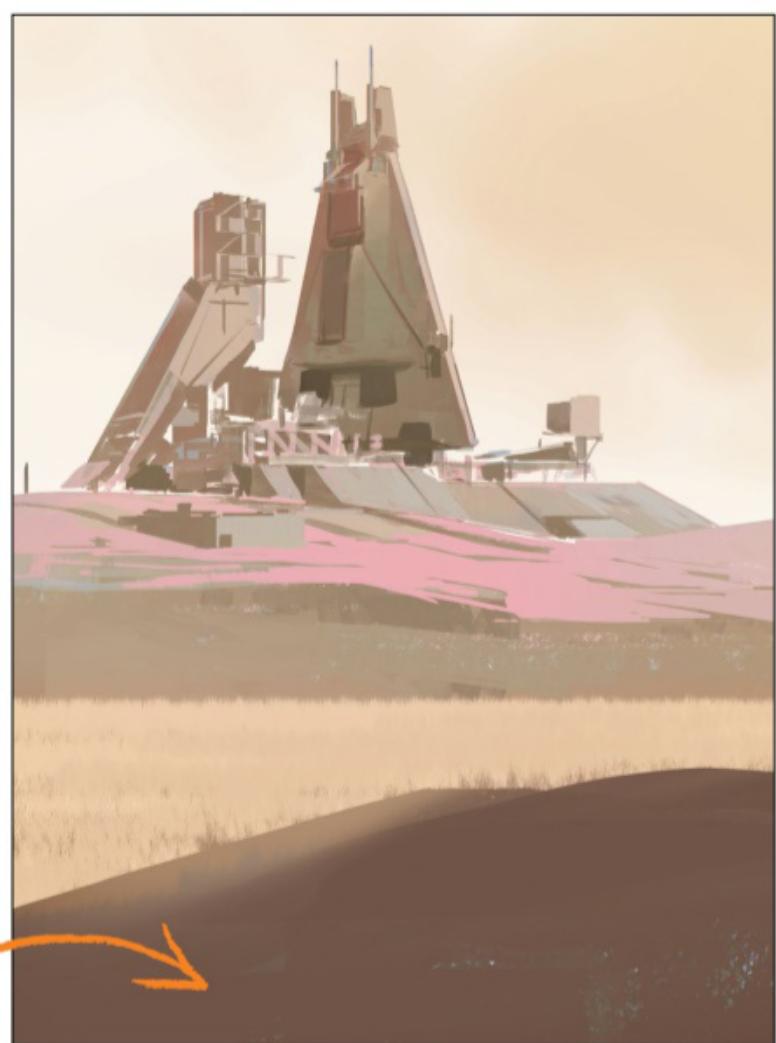
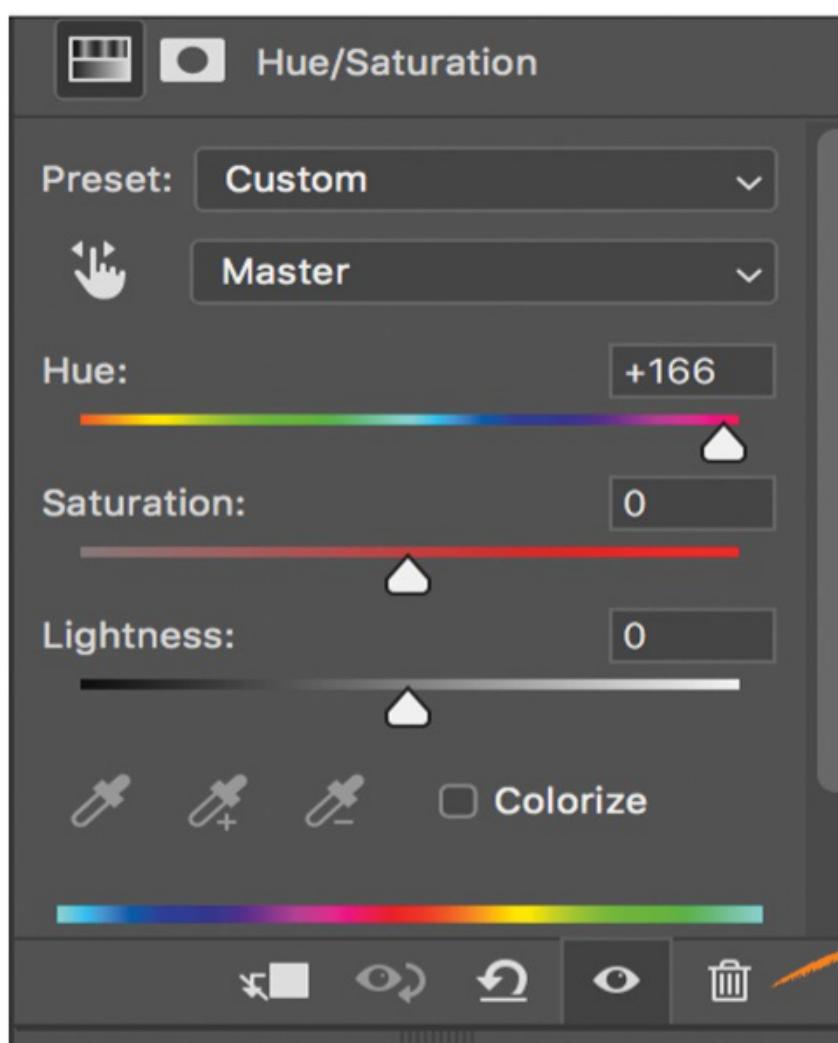
Workshops



2 Add colour to the black and white sketch

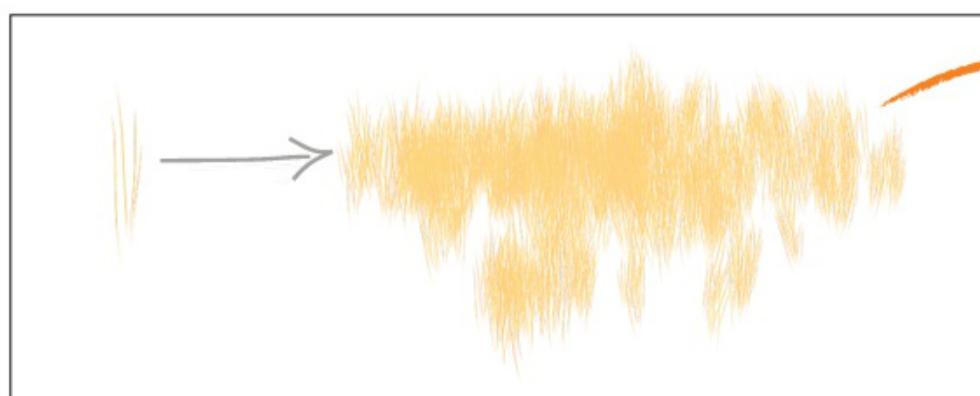
I now incrementally add colours to the image, using Lighten and Color layers. The goal is to tint the underneath grey values, and progressively stack subtle colour variants that originate from either a personal image that I'll copy on to the top layer, or obtained by simply painting using textured brushes. The properties of the Lighten and

Color layers enables me to always keep the image bright and subtle, rather than slipping into a murky morass. During this stage I also paint the sky with a blue colour that's similar to the rest of the image, which increases cohesion and helps to bring the composition together. These colours are often placeholders, but I need them in place to proof-test the image, and make sure it's worth continuing with.



3 Adjusting the hue and saturation in the piece

During this step I further define the final colours as well as the general colour interactions between areas and planes. I believe the scene should be warmer to better emphasise fields and crops. In the Hue/Saturation dialog I move the slider right, to +166, which brings out a bit of detailing on the rocket. These are basic blocking shapes and give the impression of complex details, yet they comprise only a few brush strokes.



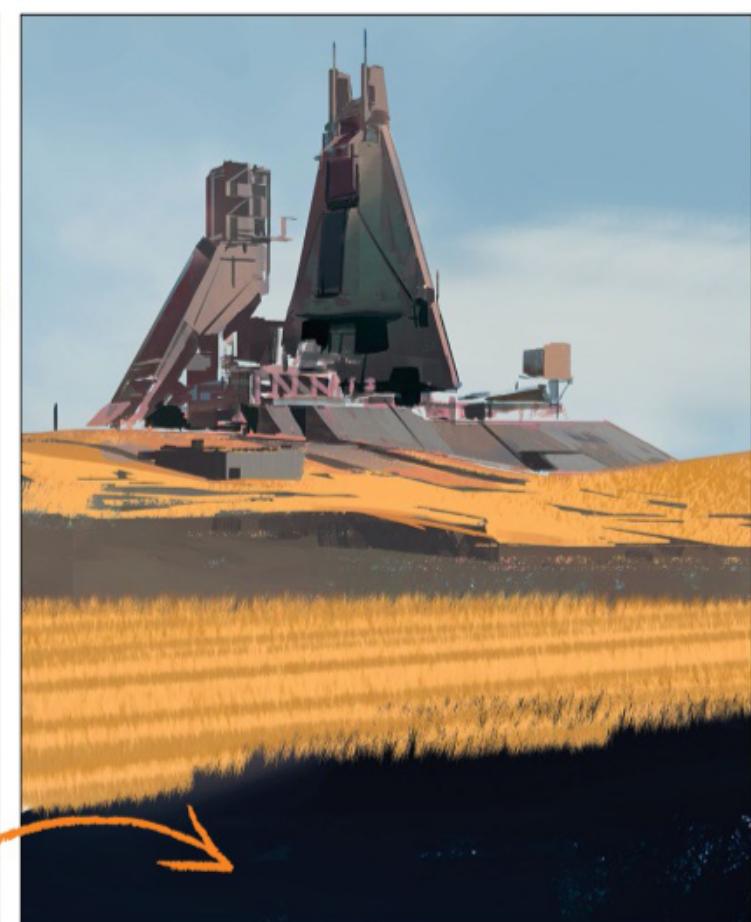
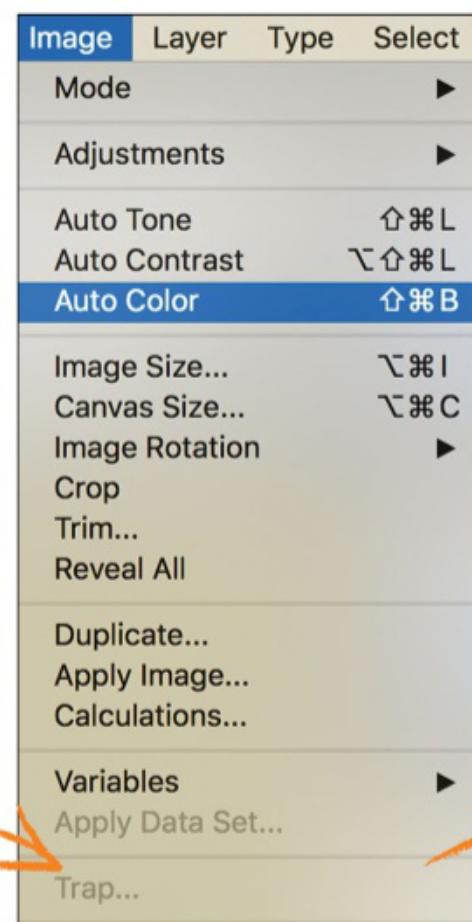
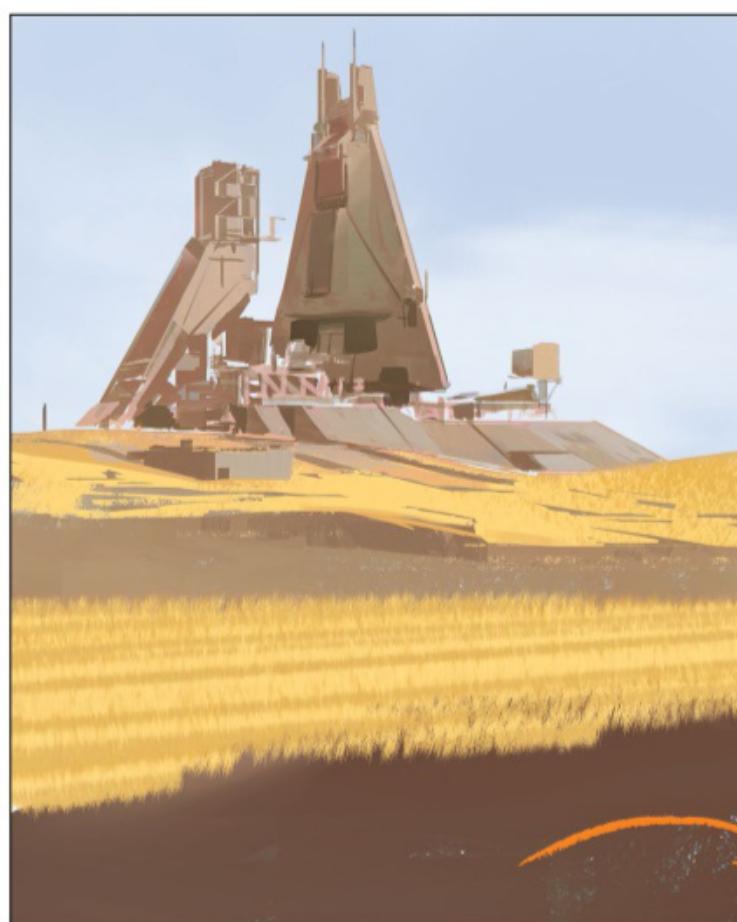
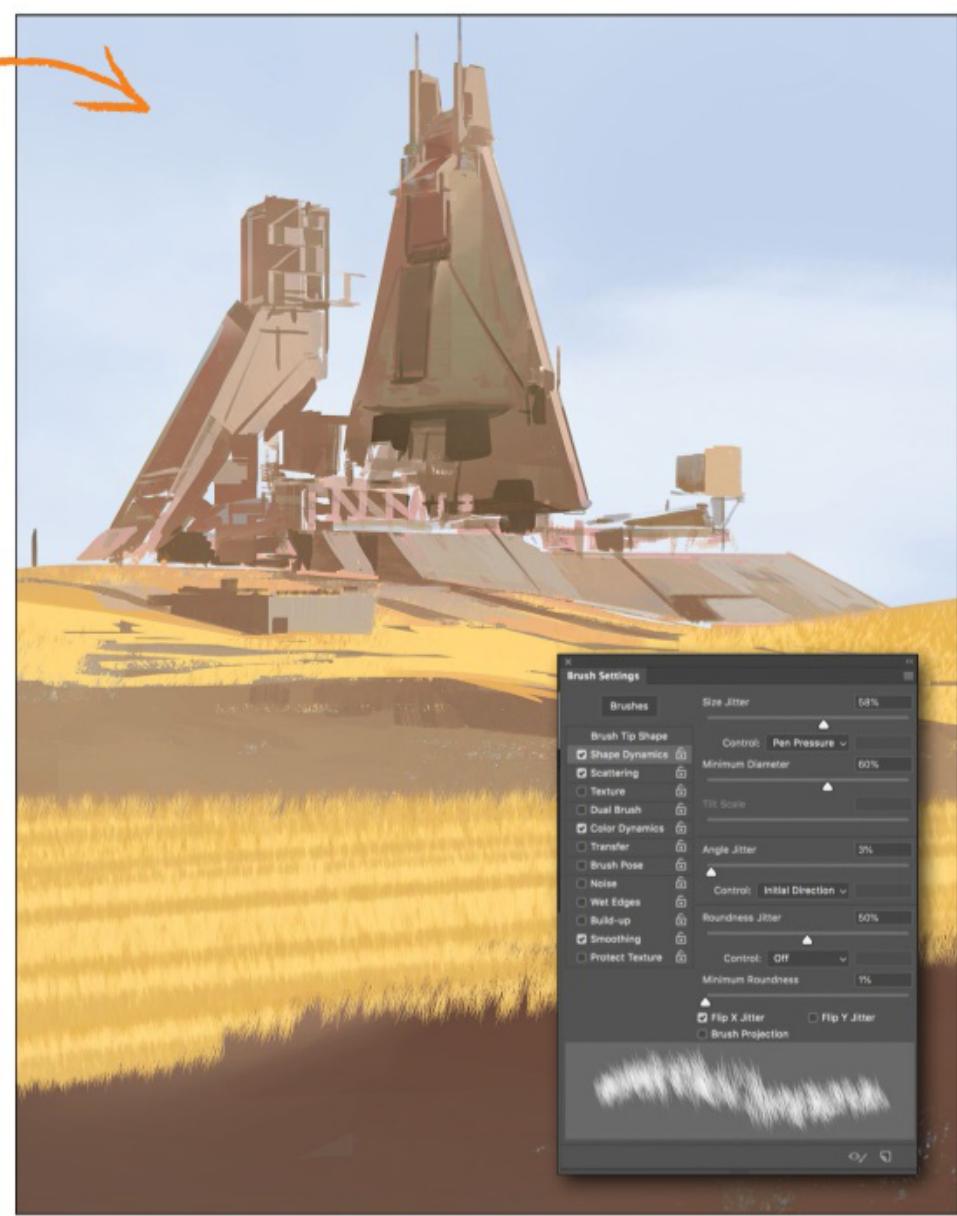
4 Start painting

Now that the rendering phase is complete, I turn my attention to refining the yellow grass. I'll do this in two steps. First, I'll define the general patch of grass and its boundaries, using a subtle vertical grass brush. Once the whole surface is covered, I'll add long patches of horizontal grass with a slightly darker value.

There are numerous ways to make a custom grass brush. Just remember that trial and error is the key to improving your brushes. In this case, I decide to keep Initial Direction on the brush active, to emphasise the consistent look of the grass. I also add some Color Dynamics to the

brush to give the grass a more natural appearance.

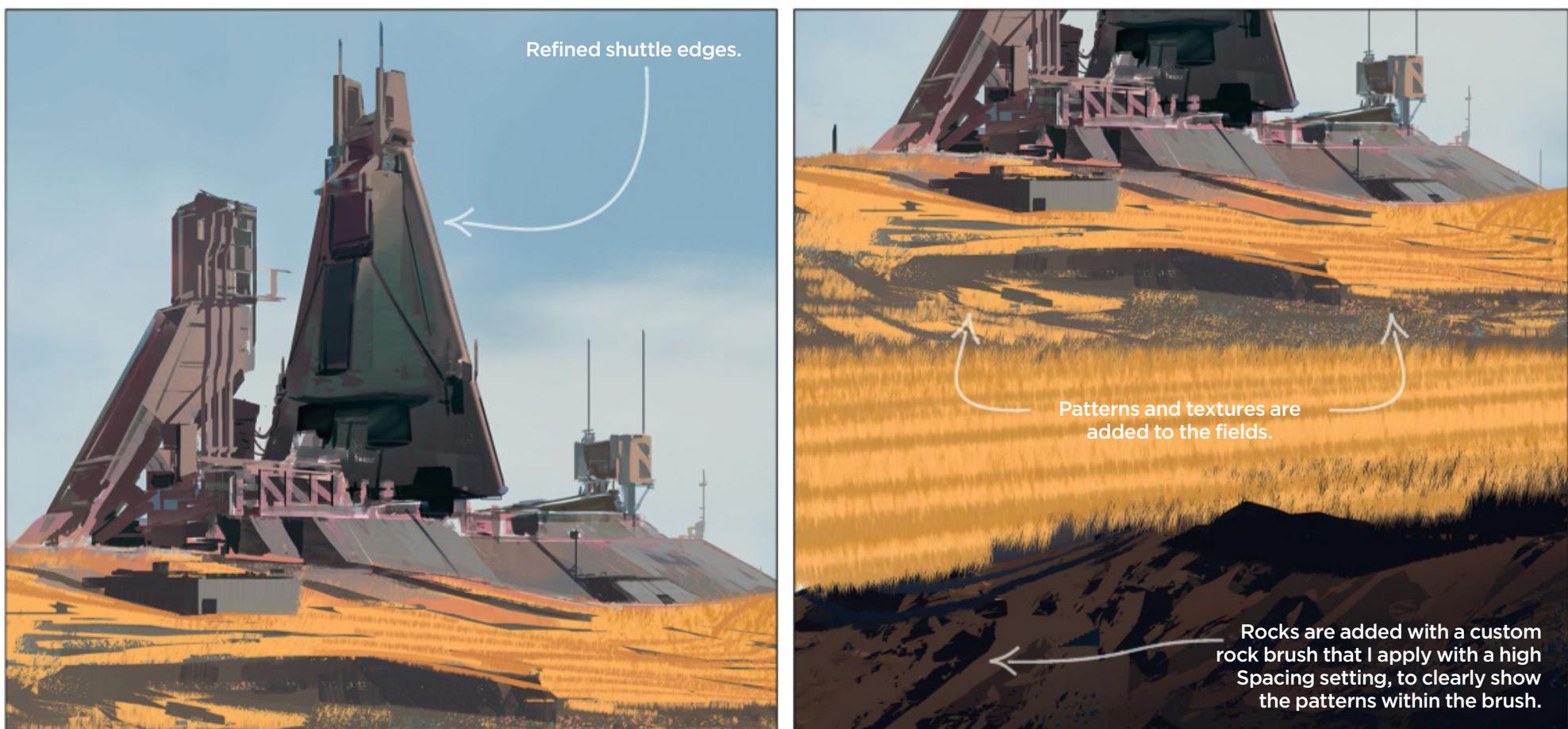
Photoshop's brush management system enables you to easily create a certain brush for a specific situation. I do recommend using bespoke brushes, but only in small quantities. This scene was painted with between six and eight custom brushes, including one cloud and one rock brush. The other advantage of limiting the number of brushes is that you'll give more consistency to the rhythms and microshapes of your image. The human eye is always in search of repetitive patterns, and adding these repetitions through the use of a small set of brushes will benefit your artwork no end.



5 Making use of Photoshop's Auto Color tool

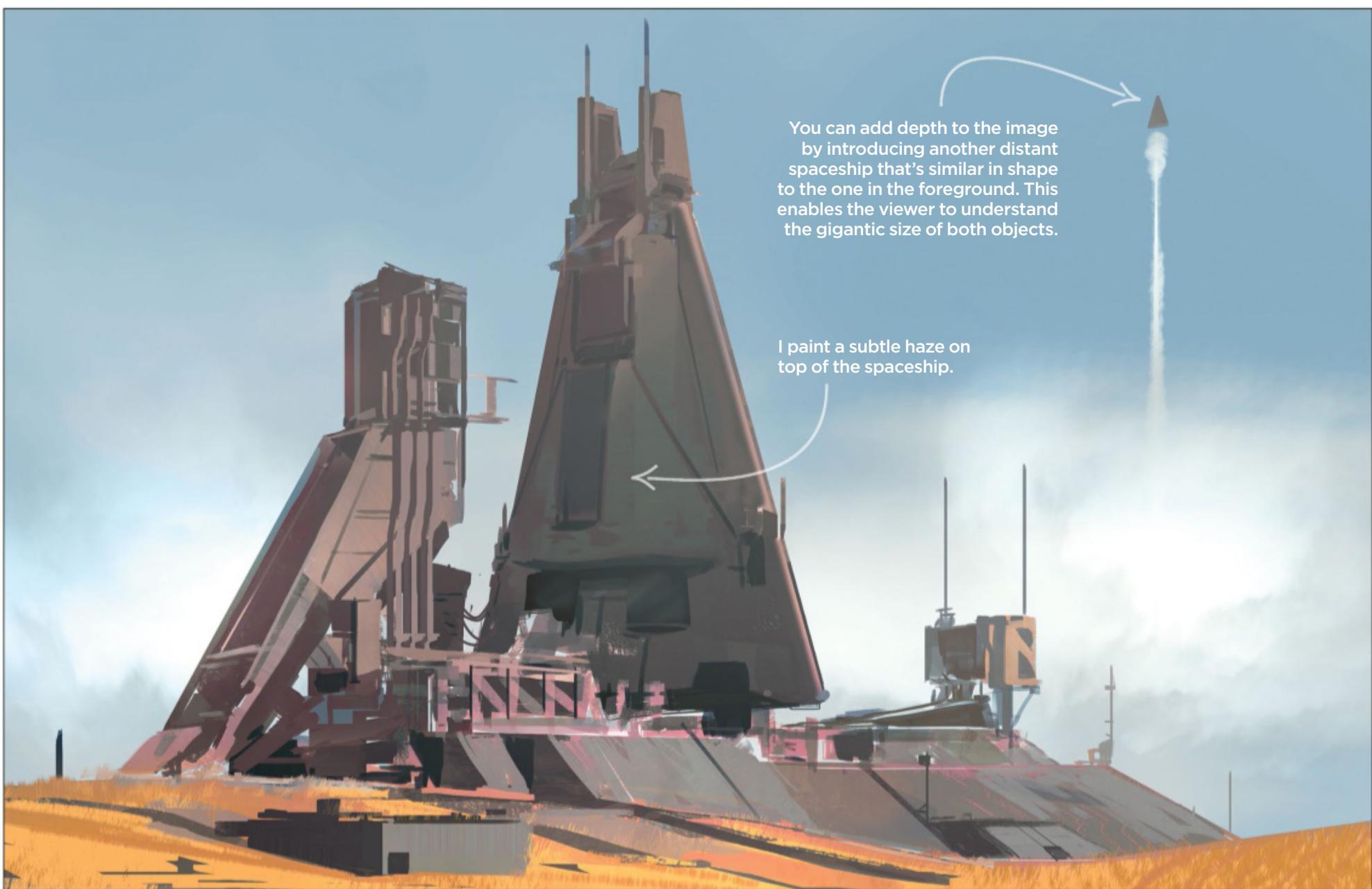
I've always been a huge fan of Photoshop's Auto features (Auto Tones, Auto Contrasts and Auto Colors). My primary aim when using these tools is to quickly push the values, colours and contrasts within the artwork towards a more realistic, and often photographic look. It's like asking Photoshop for advice! The software will suggest a rebalanced version of your values, which may or may not work depending on the subject, general composition, colour predominance, as well as Photoshop CC's algorithm. Of course, you have to use your own judgement every time you decide to give this a try. After all, you – and only you – are making all the final decisions, not the software. In this case I manage to generate a better contrast balance as well as an improved and more grounded colour setting, which I decide to keep. I'm now feeling confident that the most important task now is to render and polish the image. ➤

Workshops



6 Entering the second paint phase

This is where a large bulk of the details will appear throughout the image. As usual, I'll use natural and simple brush strokes, while ensuring that I avoid falling into the trap of over-rendering the elements in the composition.

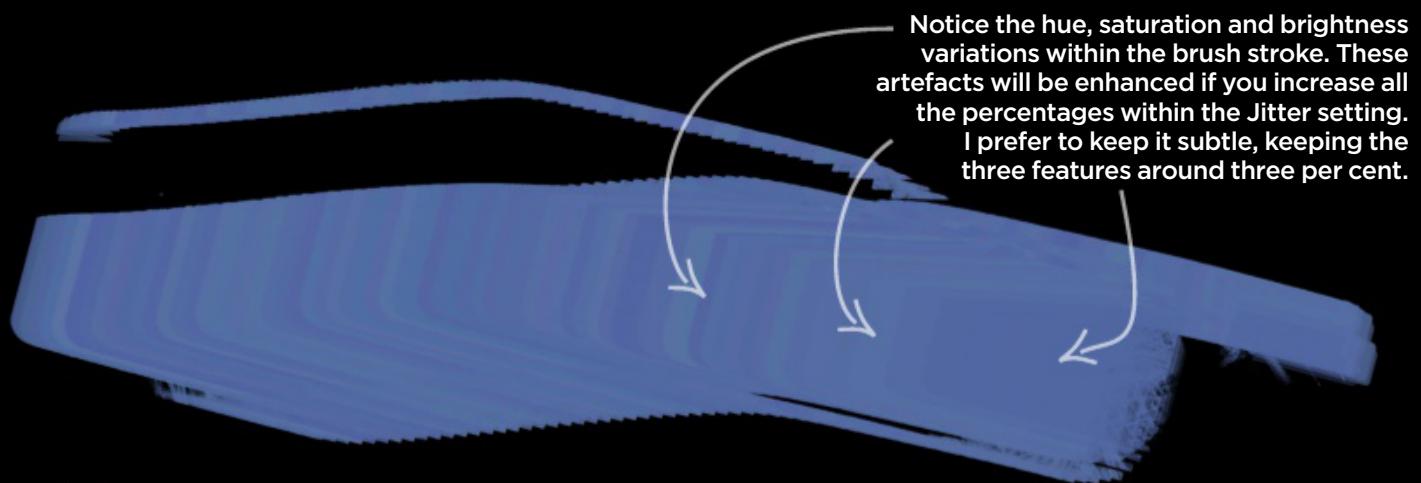
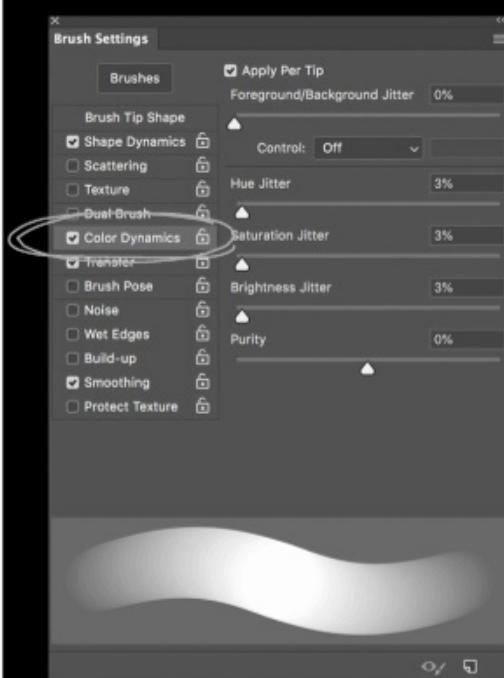


7 Refining the look of the sky

It's now time to add a layer of atmosphere. It needs to stay subtle of course, but strong enough to tone down any values that may appear too dark. At the same time, I'm going to brighten the background sky. This will make the launch pad and shuttle pop even more.

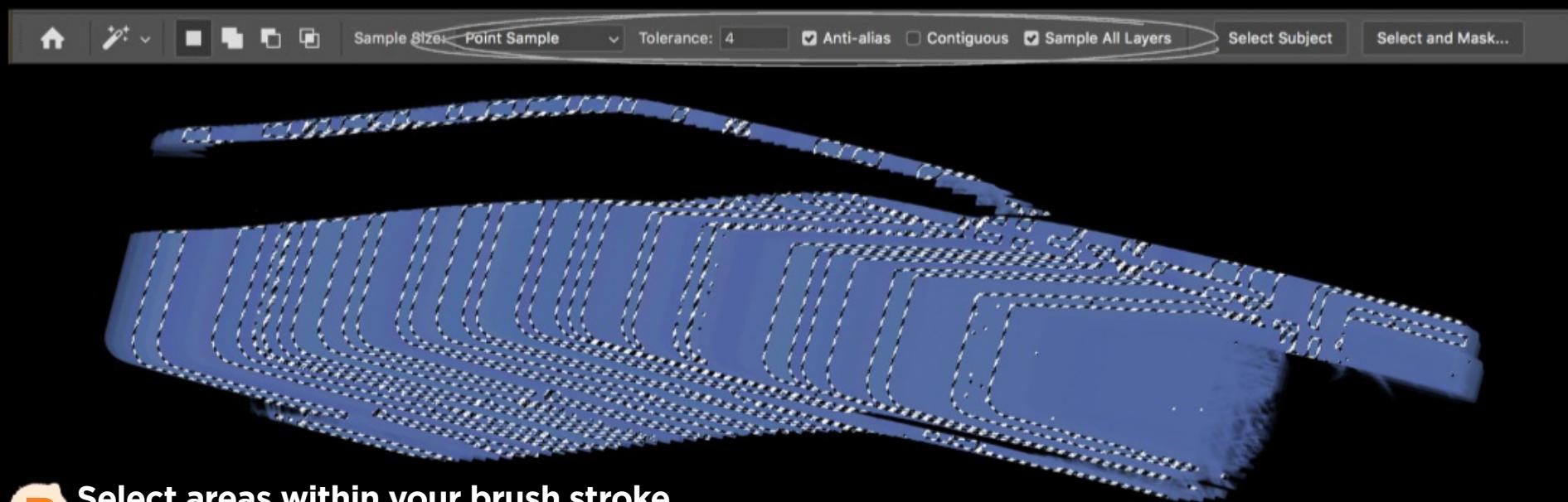
ADD TEXTURE & ARTEFACTS WITH THE MAGIC WAND

When properly handled, textures and patterns are a welcome addition to any image. They'll create visual impact to materials and surfaces throughout your composition, and can be as precise or loose as you want them to be..



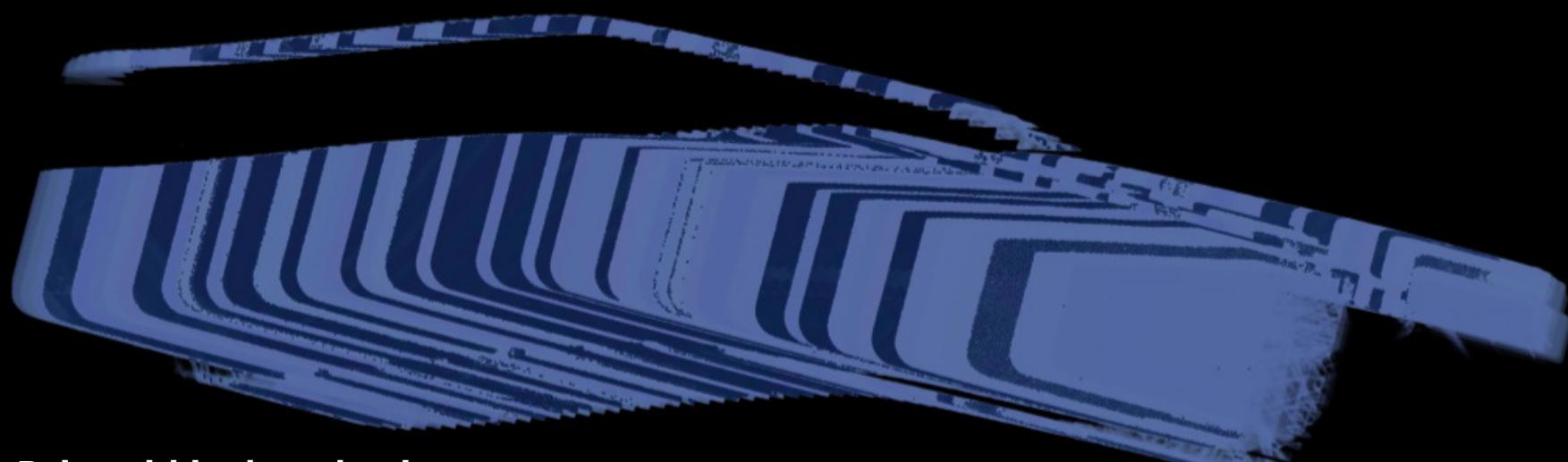
A Apply Color Dynamics to your brush

Choose a brush and click the Color Dynamics option in the brush settings. To make sure that you see the effect, chose a value for your brush that will be neither too bright nor too dark. In addition, be aware that the Color Dynamics features will be more visible if the Spacing of your brush is high. Ideally, keep the Spacing between four and 10 per cent.



B Select areas within your brush stroke

Chose an area within your brush stroke, and select it with the Magic Wand tool. Press Shift to select several areas if necessary. In the Magic Wand tool menu, make sure that the Sample Size is set to Point Sample, the Tolerance is around four, the Contiguous option is deactivated, and that you Sample All Layers.



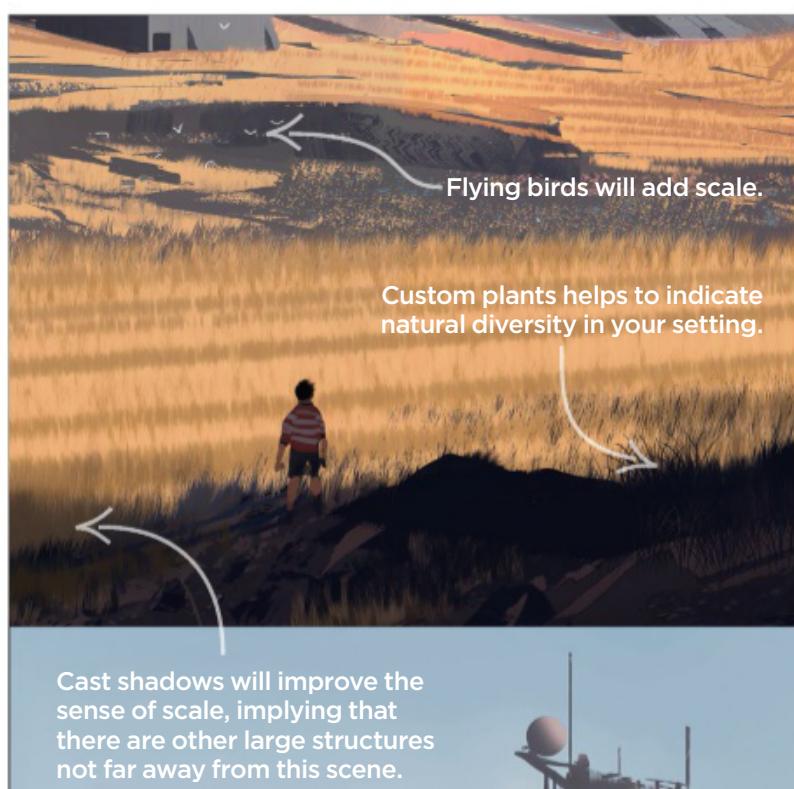
C Paint within the selection

Select a brush and start painting within your selection with a darker colour. You'll now see patterns and rhythms appear. They'll be logically following the edges of the brush stroke. Have fun giving it a try with different brush shapes and Spacing settings! ➤

Workshops

8 Bring in a character

One obvious and straightforward way to create a strong sense of scale in a landscape piece is to add some foreground characters. In this case, the presence of a child silhouette will present a simple narrative that will capture the attention and curiosity of the viewer. There's no need for me to start getting too illustrative during this stage. I start with a basic black and white silhouette of a young boy that I paint on a new layer. Once this is done, I select the child's silhouette, and paint within it. A shirt with red and white stripes will make sure that the character's easily seen, despite them being tiny into the scene.



9 Making those finishing touches

It's in this final phase that a range of small or even tiny details start appearing. These details are vital to the overall balance of shapes. They can be found all over; no area is left untouched!

I often talk to myself while painting. It pushes me to come up with a lot of ideas. Things sound much better once you say them out loud, ...

and makes them appear as if they're coming from someone else! Yes, I know this may come across as an odd approach, but it makes a lot of sense to name the objects within your scene, and to say what you are about to paint or draw. "Communication array", "Main cargo door" and "Exhaust thrusters" are all names that are driven by a function. It helps me a lot – try it as a means of boosting your concept art skills!



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ISSUE 180 ON SALE IN THE UK Friday 4 October

3ds Max & Photoshop QUICK CONCEPTS USING 3D TOOLS



Dune aficionado **Alex Jay Brady** rapidly generates ideas using basic modifiers to melt and then recrystallise 3D models in strange new forms

Artist PROFILE
Alex Jay Brady
LOCATION: England

The sci-fi-loving freelance artist lives in Brighton with her girlfriend and hundreds of pot plant children. She designed some of the ships in the recent Captain Marvel film.
<http://ifxm.ag/ajbrady>

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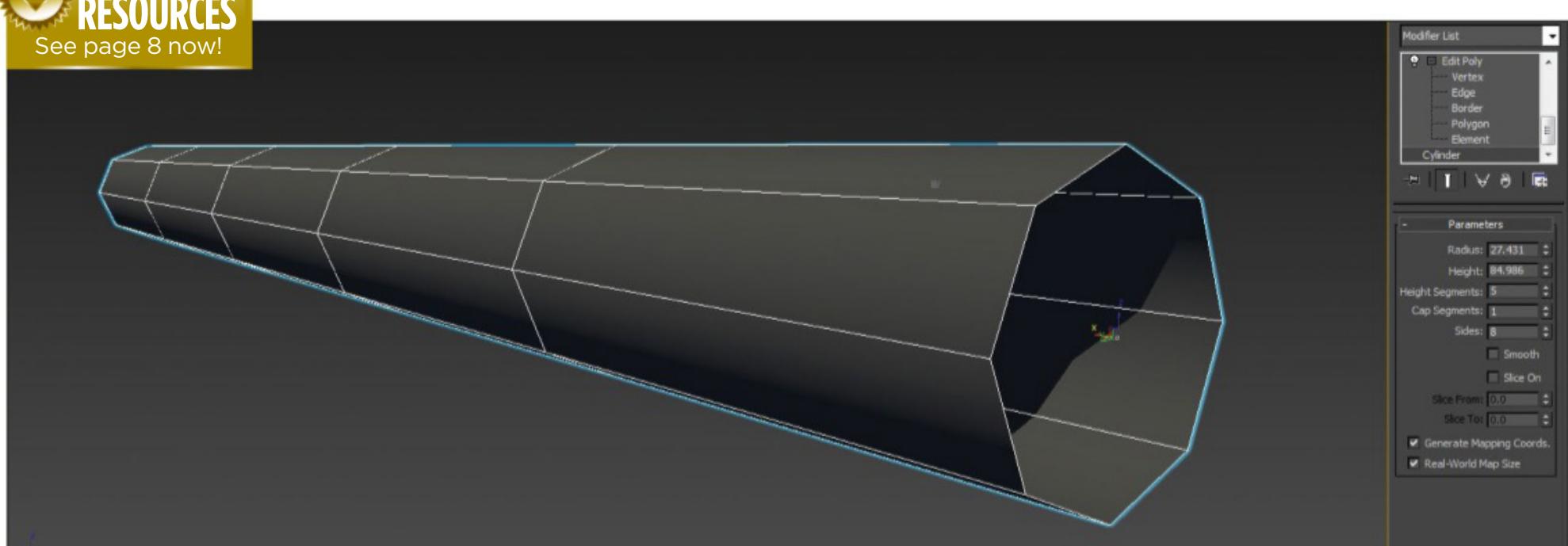
It can be hard to come up with ideas when your imagination is as blank as the page in front of you. A much easier task is generating a lot of possible ideas very quickly, before selecting interesting ones to develop. I find this is true at all stages of a project and most especially at the beginning. In this workshop I'll show you some ways to do this quickly, by applying basic modifiers to simple

geometry and using trial and error to generate interesting results.

Essentially, we're taking simple solids, melting them and then allowing them to recrystallise in interesting ways. The melting part is 3ds Max's MeshSmooth modifier, and the crystallisation aspect is the ProOptimizer modifier. Another way to imagine it might be when you use translation software to convert a phrase to another language, then back to English. The software makes

odd choices so the phrase can become garbled and mutated. Often, the results can be odd, triggering an interesting idea in your imagination.

Because the process is quick you can try it many times and keep just the most interesting results, or use it iteratively on a single object. Let me show you what I mean, by depicting a scene from the Dune universe. Here, giant Guild Heighliners are about to transport a fleet of smaller craft – travelling without moving...

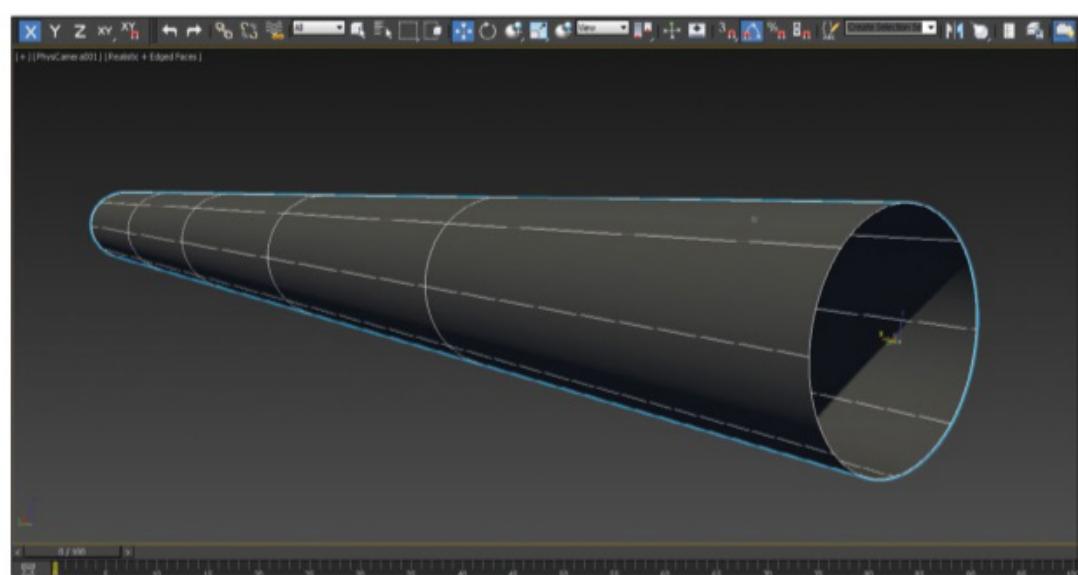


1 Creating the Heighliner's basic shape

I want my ship to have a giant cylindrical hull covered in small, slightly irregular panels. I'm not exactly sure what it'll look like so I start to experiment by making a low poly cylinder and cutting the ends off, leaving an open tube.

2 Adjusting the surface appearance

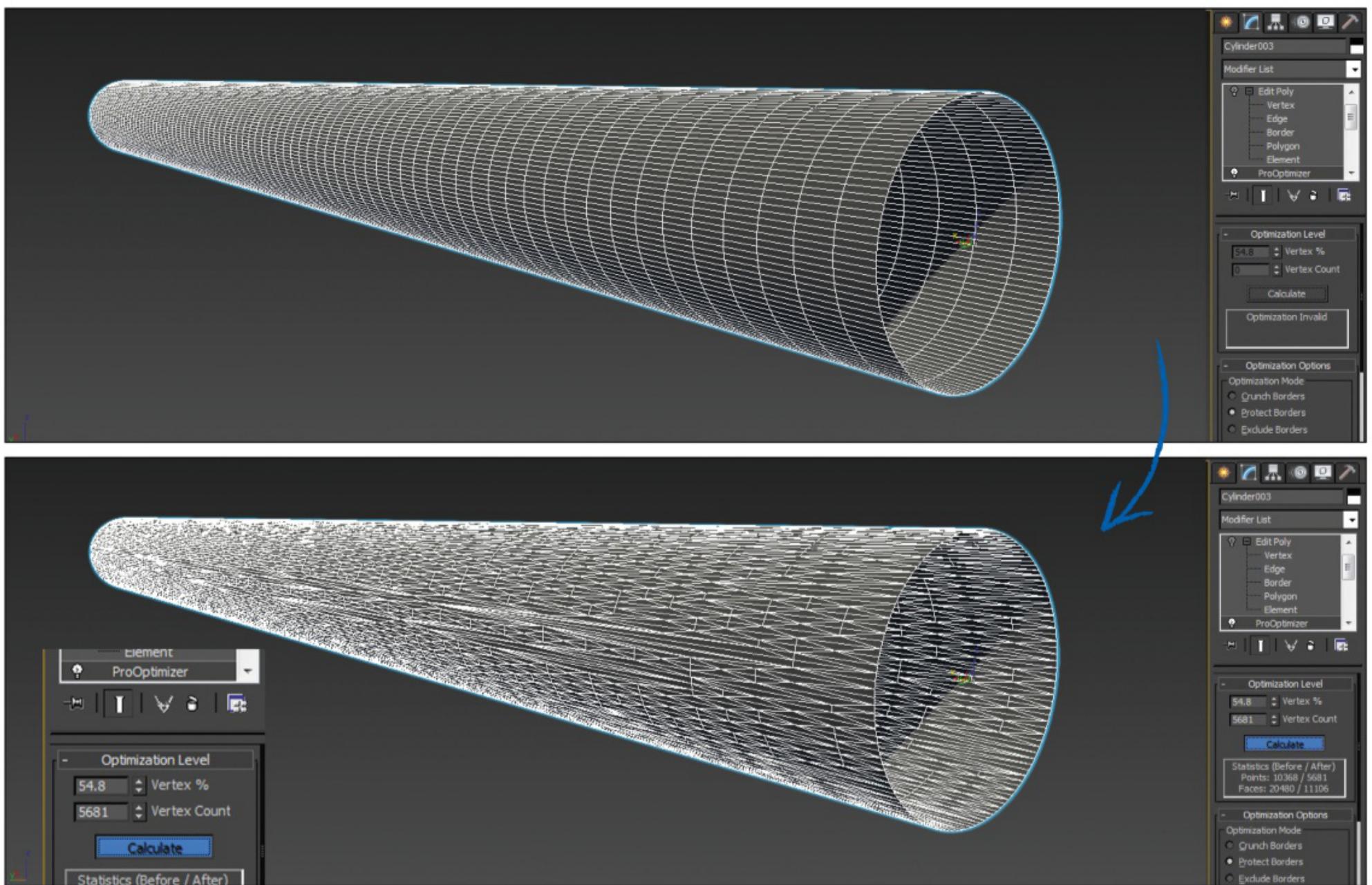
I apply the MeshSmooth modifier. This works by subdividing the surface polygons, making the surfaces smooth and curved as if they've melted and flowed like liquid. For now the default setting will work fine, but MeshSmooth has several presets that can be tweaked to your personal taste. Feel free to experiment with these later; some generate an organic look, others look more like bevelled machinery. ➤



In depth Quick concepts

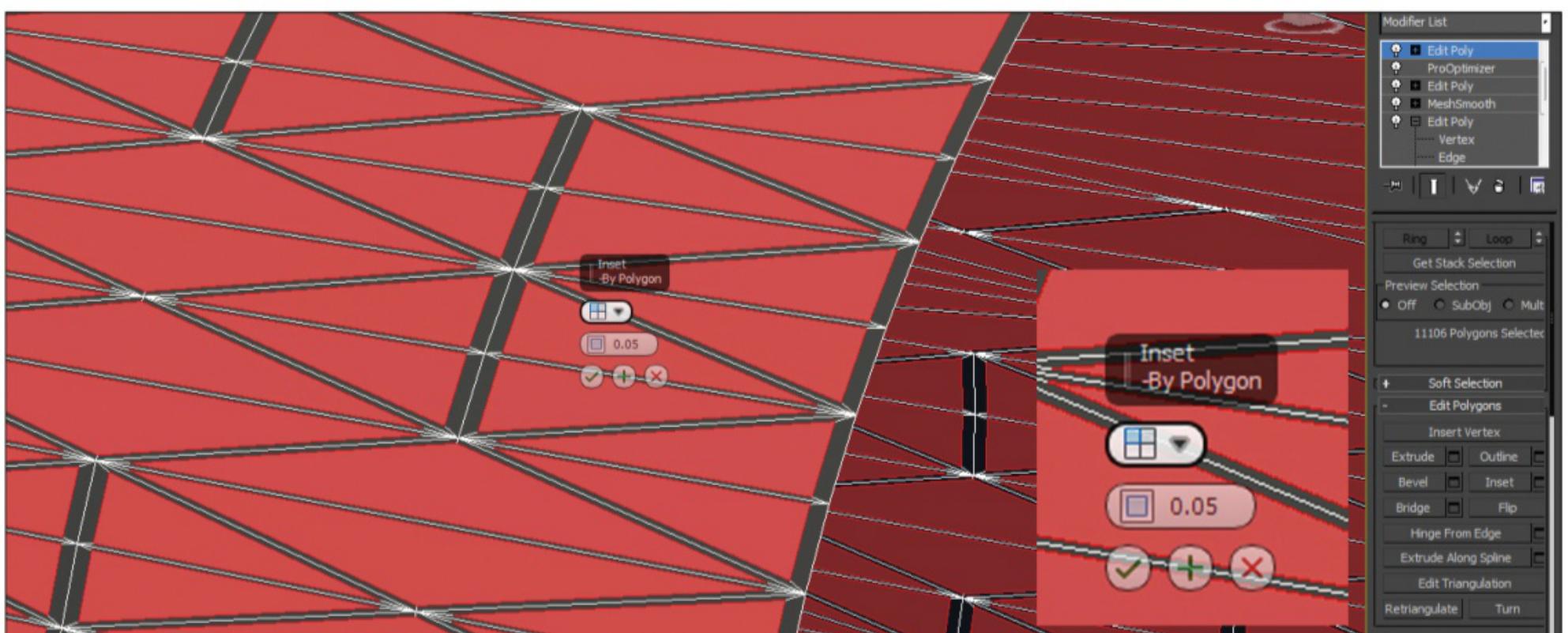


Workshops



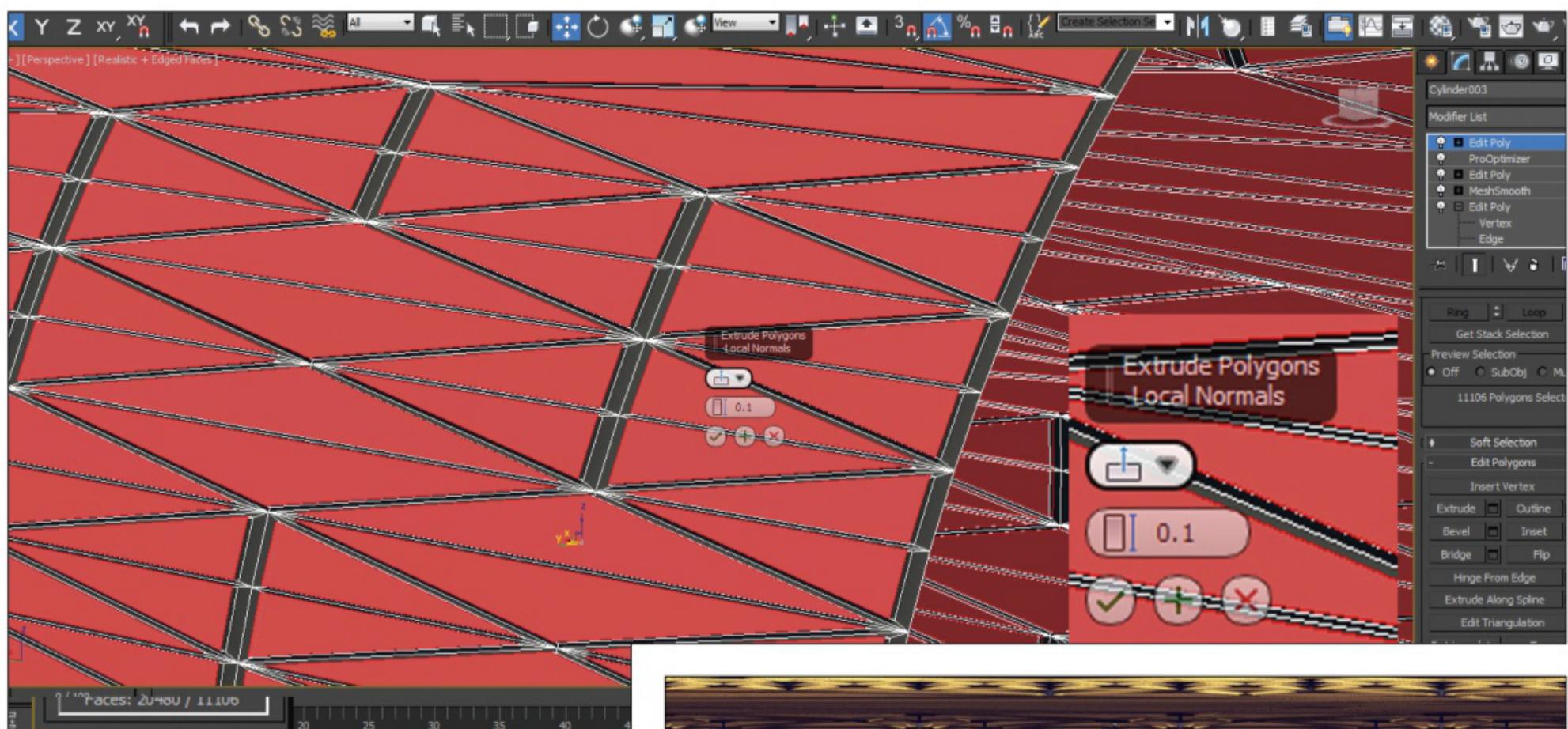
3 Adding visual interest to the surface

Next, I apply the ProOptimizer modifier that gives the Heighliner's surface a crystalline appearance. This tool automatically reduces the surface complexity of an object using an algorithm. Taking this approach is useful for modellers because it can trade some fidelity in return for making complex objects easier to manage. As I apply it to my "melted" high poly object, the algorithm selects and merges the small polygons, and the visual effect is of increasingly larger faces appearing to crystallise on the surface, creating strange shapes and patterns.



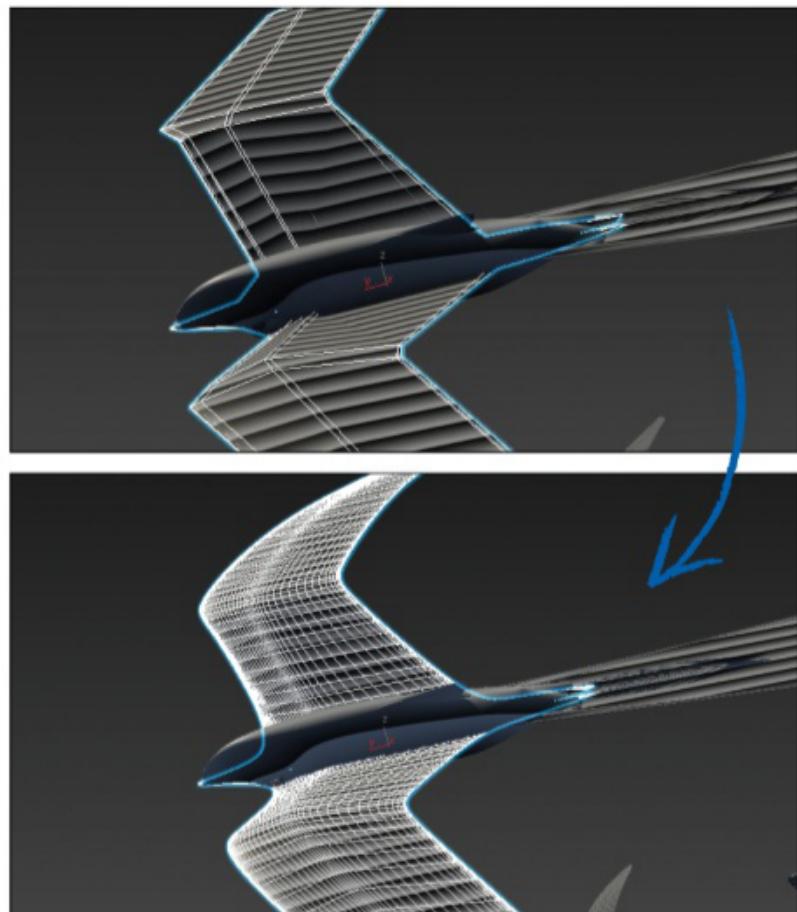
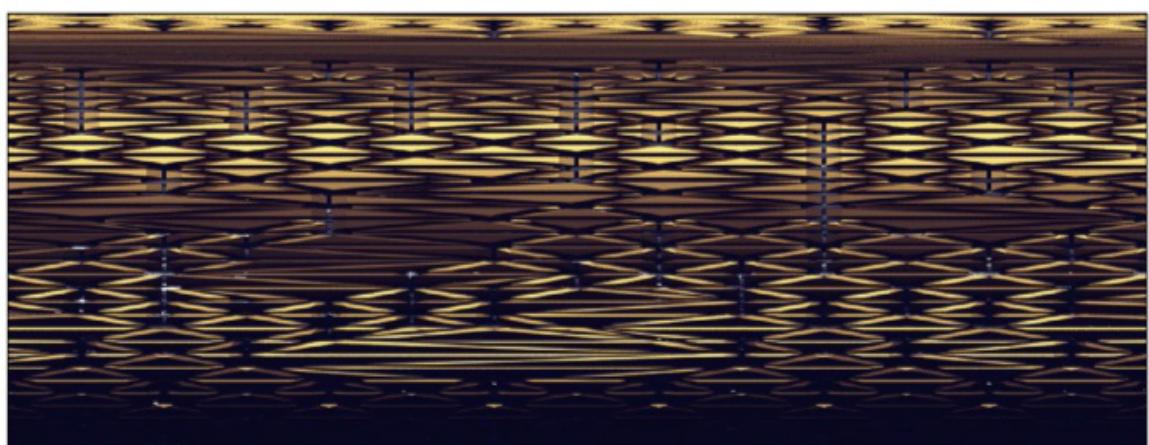
4 Refining the appearance of the tiles

I Select All Faces>Inset. This tool is within the submenu of the Edit Poly modifier. Its role is to make a smaller face within selected polygons, with edges parallel to those of its parent. This results in tiles surrounded by thin edge sections. It's important to change the default Inset Method from Group to By Polygon. This ensures the inset effect is applied to each small face of the surface, rather than treating the surface as a single object.



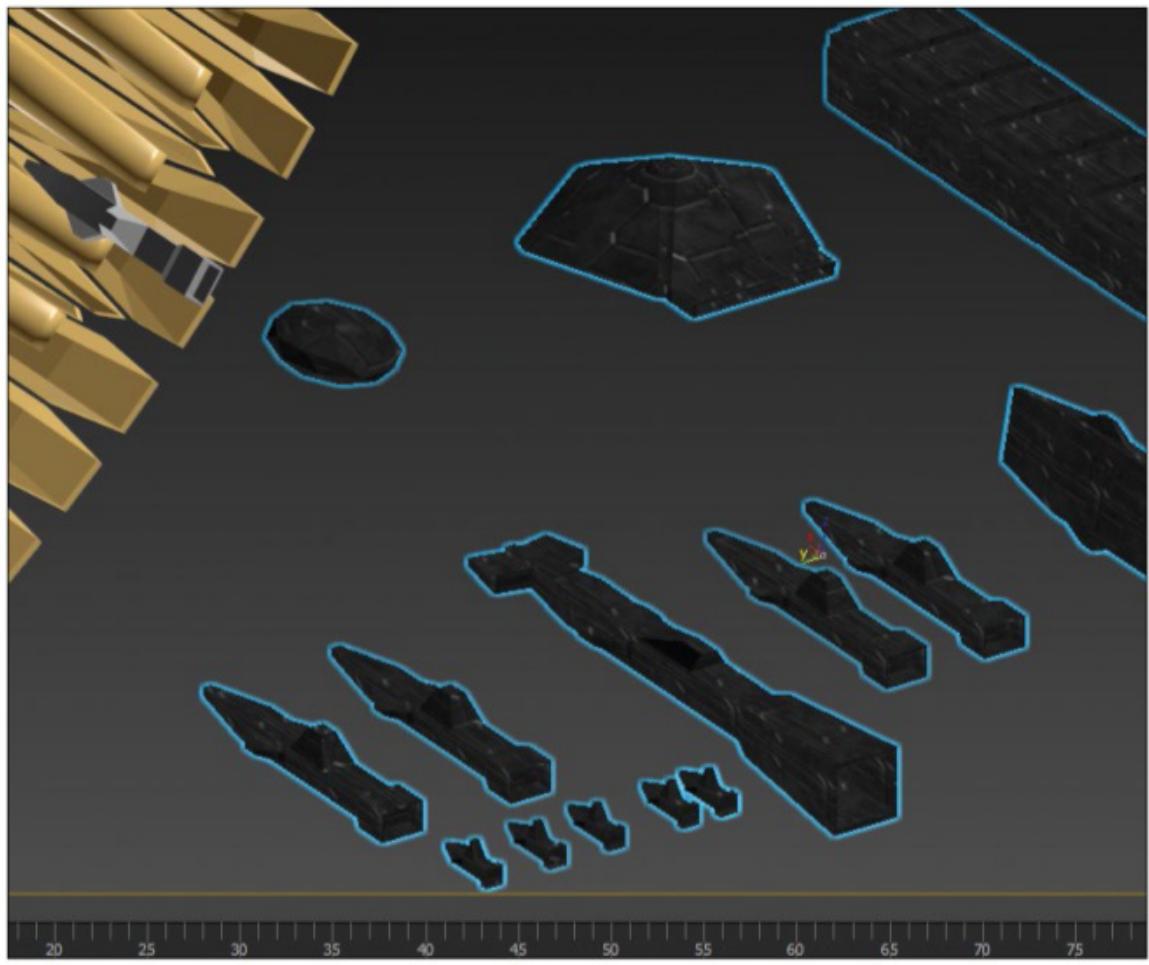
5 Extruding your polygons

This stage pushes the small tiles we created with the Inset Tool outwards, producing raised tiles surrounded by channels. It's reduced the number of faces produced using the ProOptimizer tool by 54 per cent. I discovered this quasi-periodic tiling of the surface by trial and error, sliding the ProOptimizer's dial up and down to different values and observing the results. I could never have designed this pattern, but it's just what I'm looking for.



6 Softening the look of smaller ships

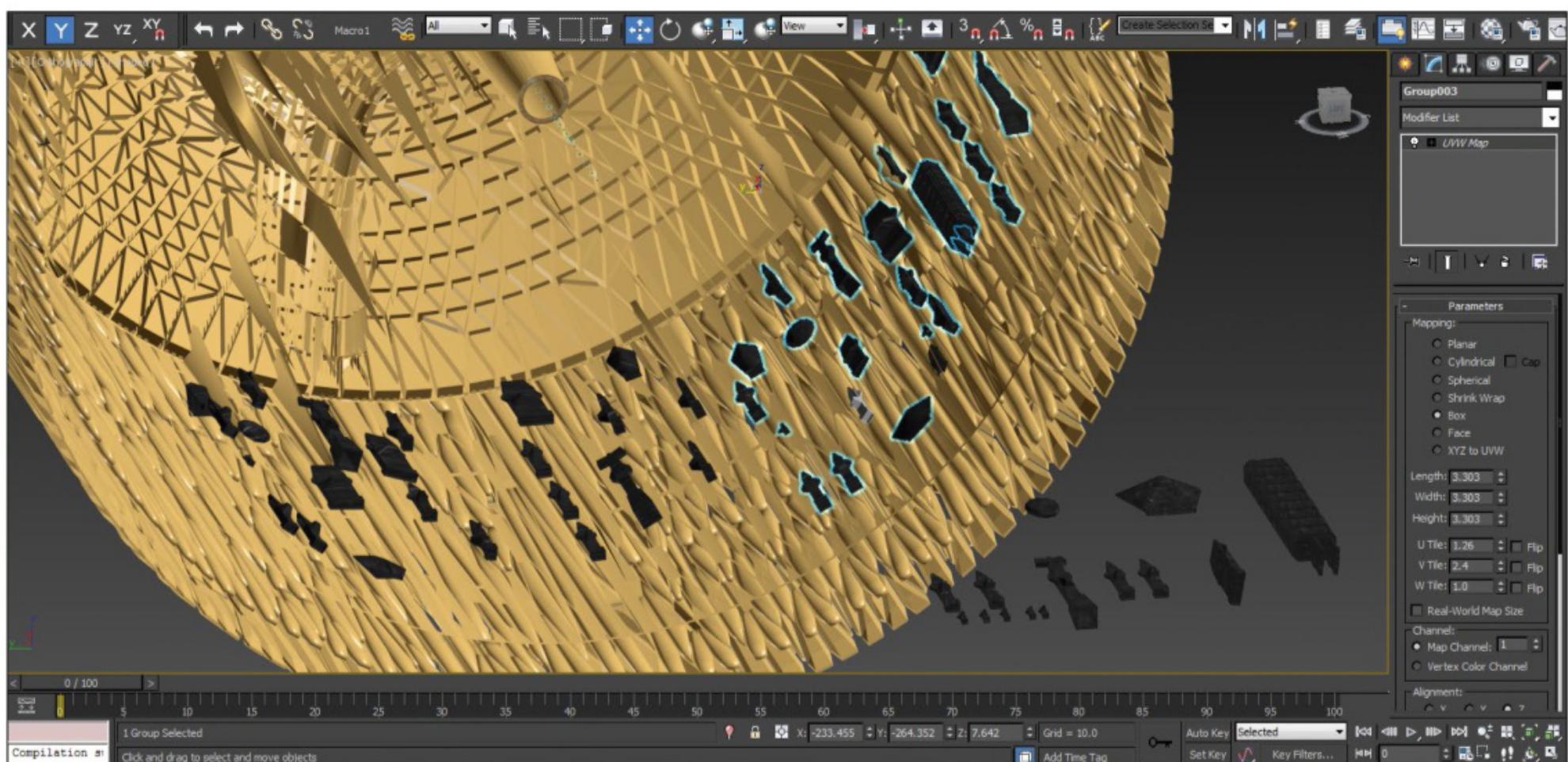
I made these little transport ships by building very simple shapes for the wings, and then applying a MeshSmooth modifier to them, which melts them in the same way as before. The hard edges of the surface become smooth, which gives the craft a more organic look.



7 Generating a fleet of military spaceships

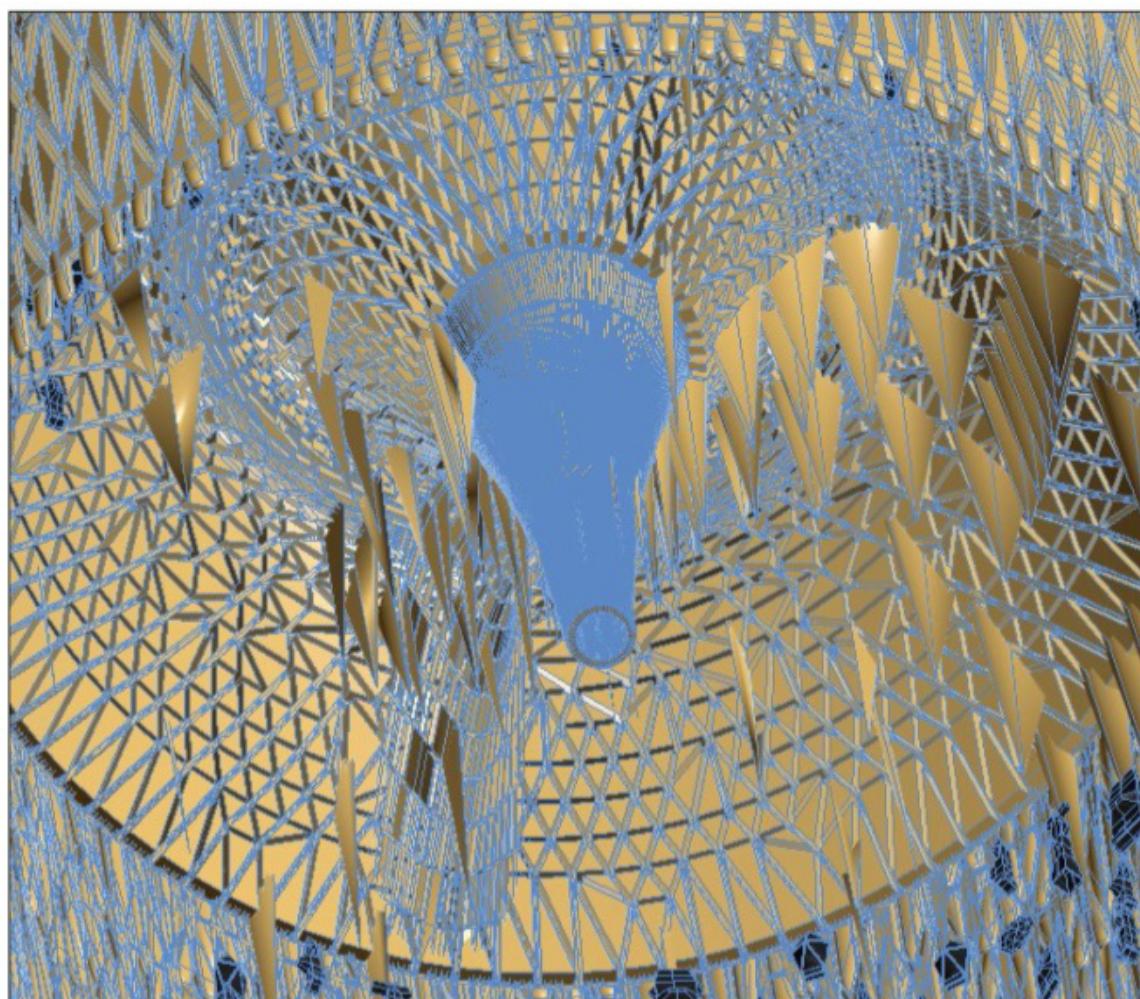
For the navy ships positioned around the forecourt of the Heighliner, I make some simple objects and apply a hull metal texture to them. I figure that because they'll be small in the final image, these dark, simple, brutal-looking chisel shapes would inform the viewer that they're military warships and transports. ➤

Workshops



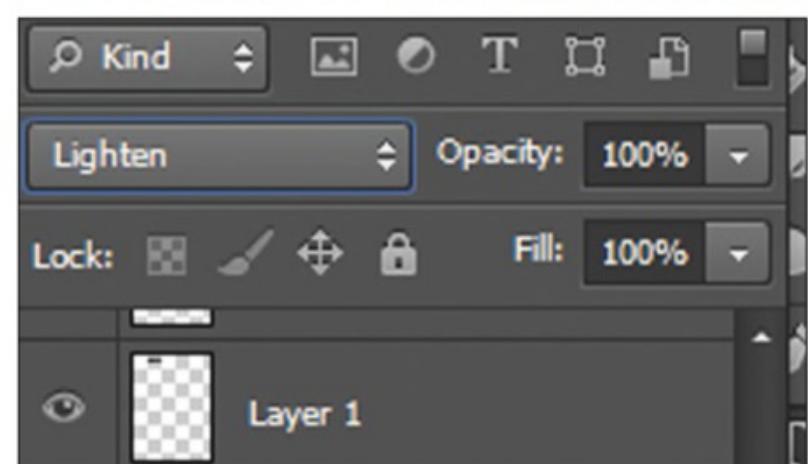
8 Expanding the size of the military fleet

I spread the navy ships around a section of the Heighliner's inner hull, and copy-paste that group around the rest of the circumference. This is where 3D is at its most useful in my work: placing objects in space quickly saves me the effort of using vanishing points and perspective lines to draw them manually. Once in place I move them around a bit to prevent them from looking too obviously like duplicates. I find it's much easier to build an orderly system and then mess it up artfully, rather than building a genuinely chaotic one from scratch piece by piece.



9 The Heighliner's structure and happy accidents

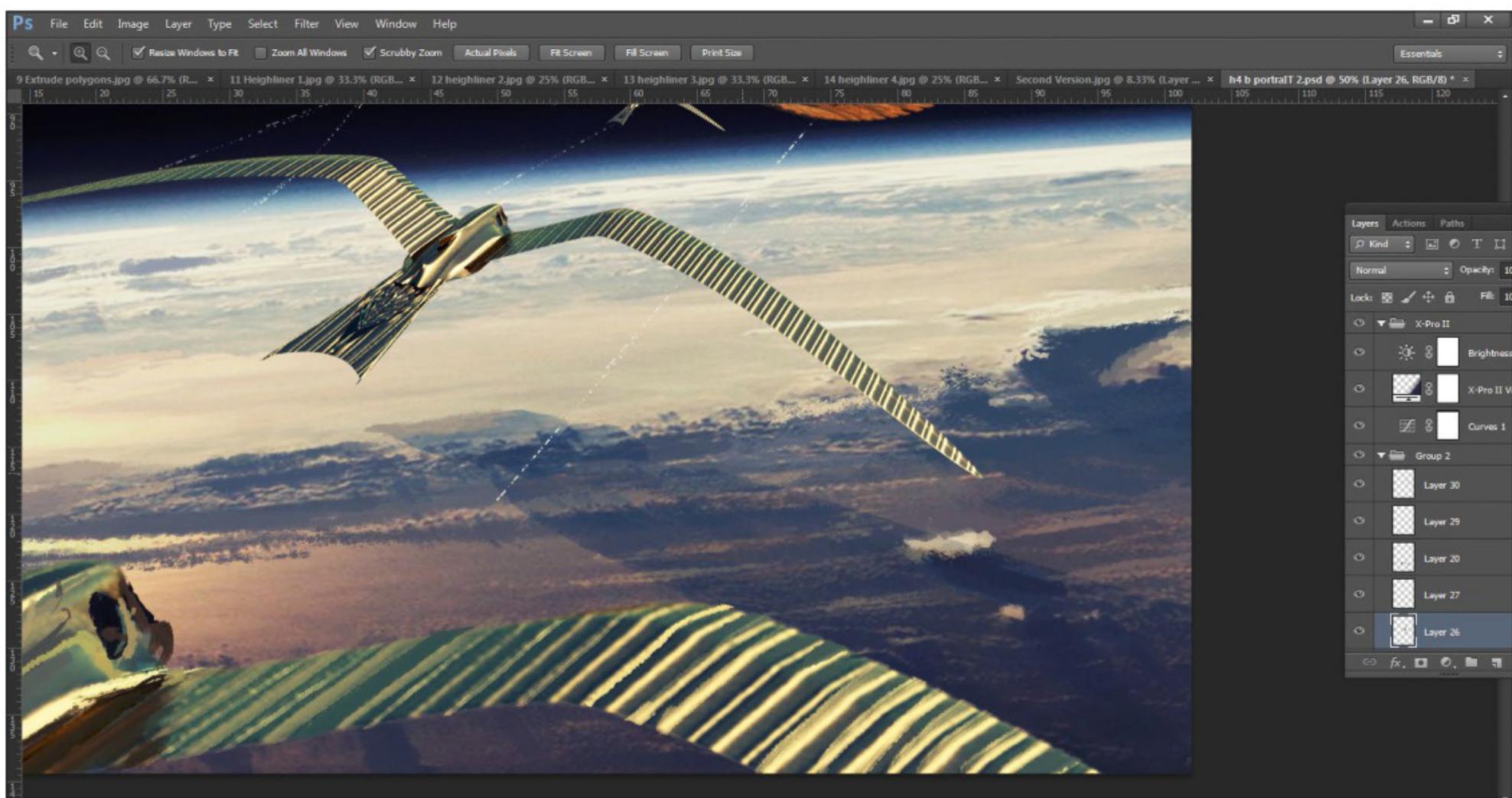
The end cap and main front door of the Heighliner is made in the same way as the hull. I melt and crystallise a bagel-shaped object, then Inset and Extrude the faces before slicing it in half. This creates a weird-looking spout shape, but something else happens to the surface. It randomly glitches for some reason, resulting in these strange random spikes that protrude out from the surface. I like this strange, unexpected result and keep it.



10 Painting details

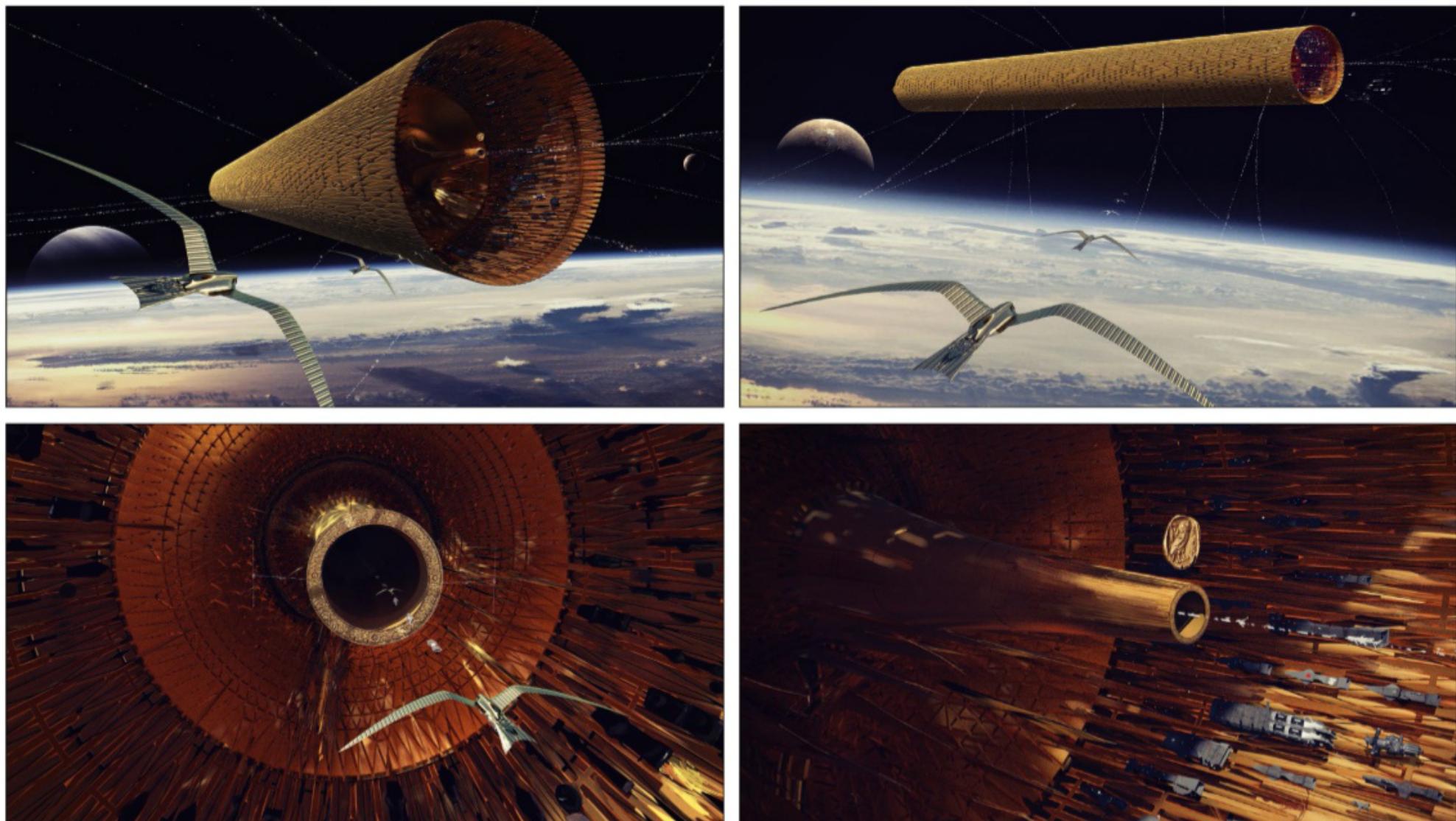
I take the image into Photoshop and paint sunlight sparkles, lights on the navy ships and other details with the Hard round brush, bringing the image to life. The streams of ships entering the giant doors of the Heighliner originated as a night-time photo of a city horizon; the randomly spaced lights, cut out and placed on a Lighten layer, help to provide some chaotic detail to the scene.

In depth Quick concepts



11 Providing the viewer with a sense of scale

I also paint in the tremendous shadow cast by the Heighliner on the clouds below. It's important to spend time at the end of the work to hone little story details like this, which help give the viewer a sense of the scale and spatial relationships of the objects in the scene.



12 Developing multiple compositions and storytelling ideas in 3D

Another useful aspect of working in 3D is that you can shoot your objects from multiple angles and configurations. This enables you to show the object in different states, rearrange them to better suit a page layout, or as in this case, take the viewer through a storytelling sequence: first, approaching the Heighliner and then passing through the tremendous door into its interior, revealing the smaller transport ships.

Core Skills: Part 2

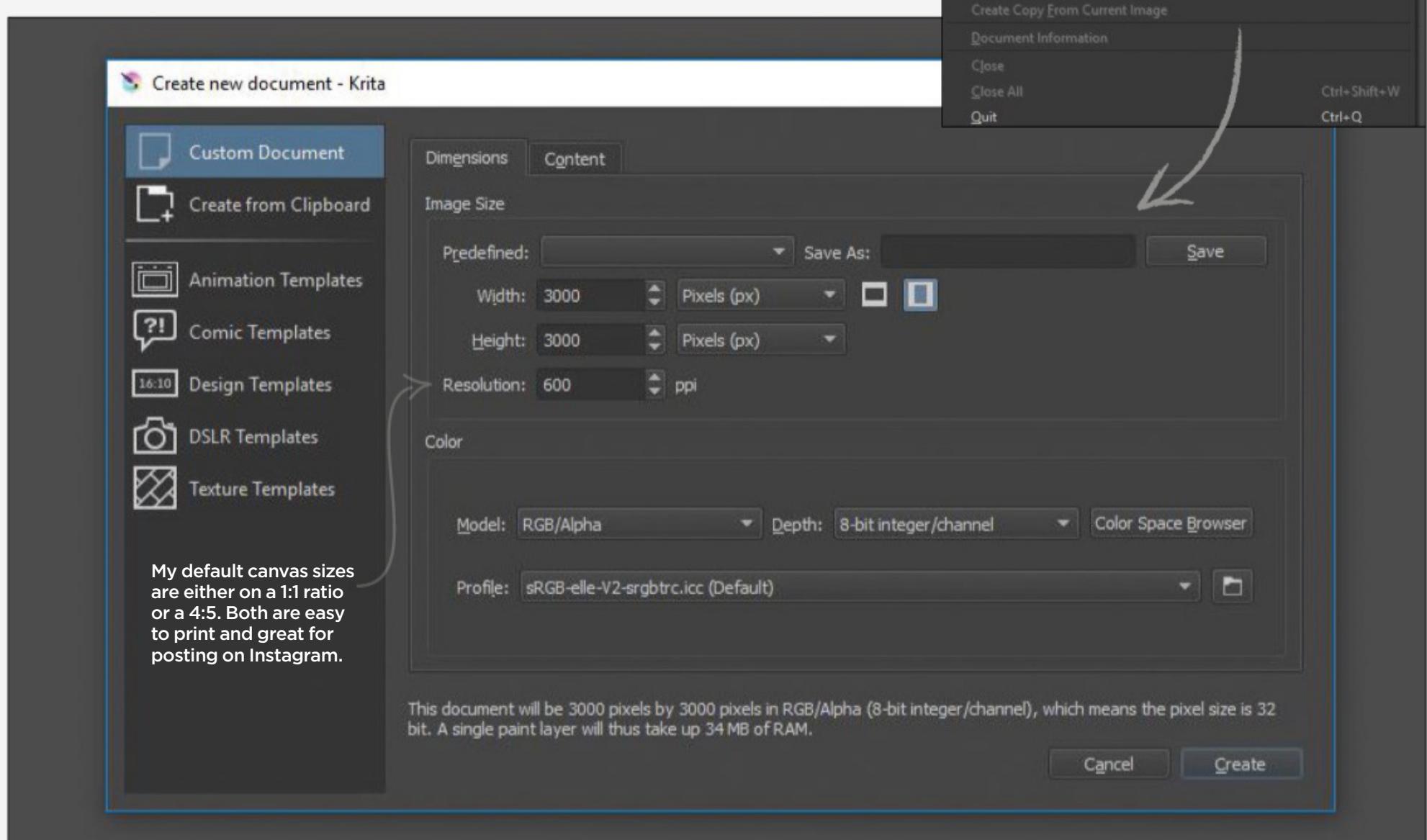
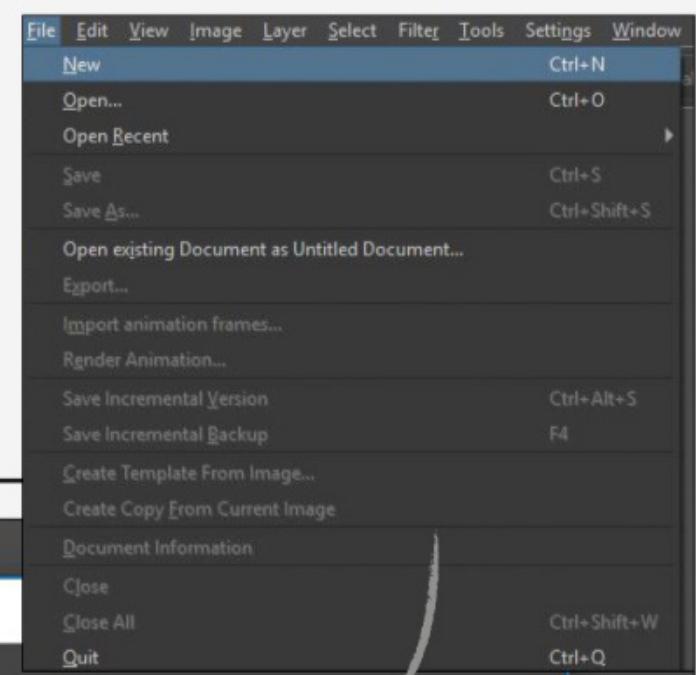
LEARN YOUR WAY AROUND KRITA

Sara Tepes continues her series on the free painting program by taking a tour of Krita's tools and its pared-back workspace



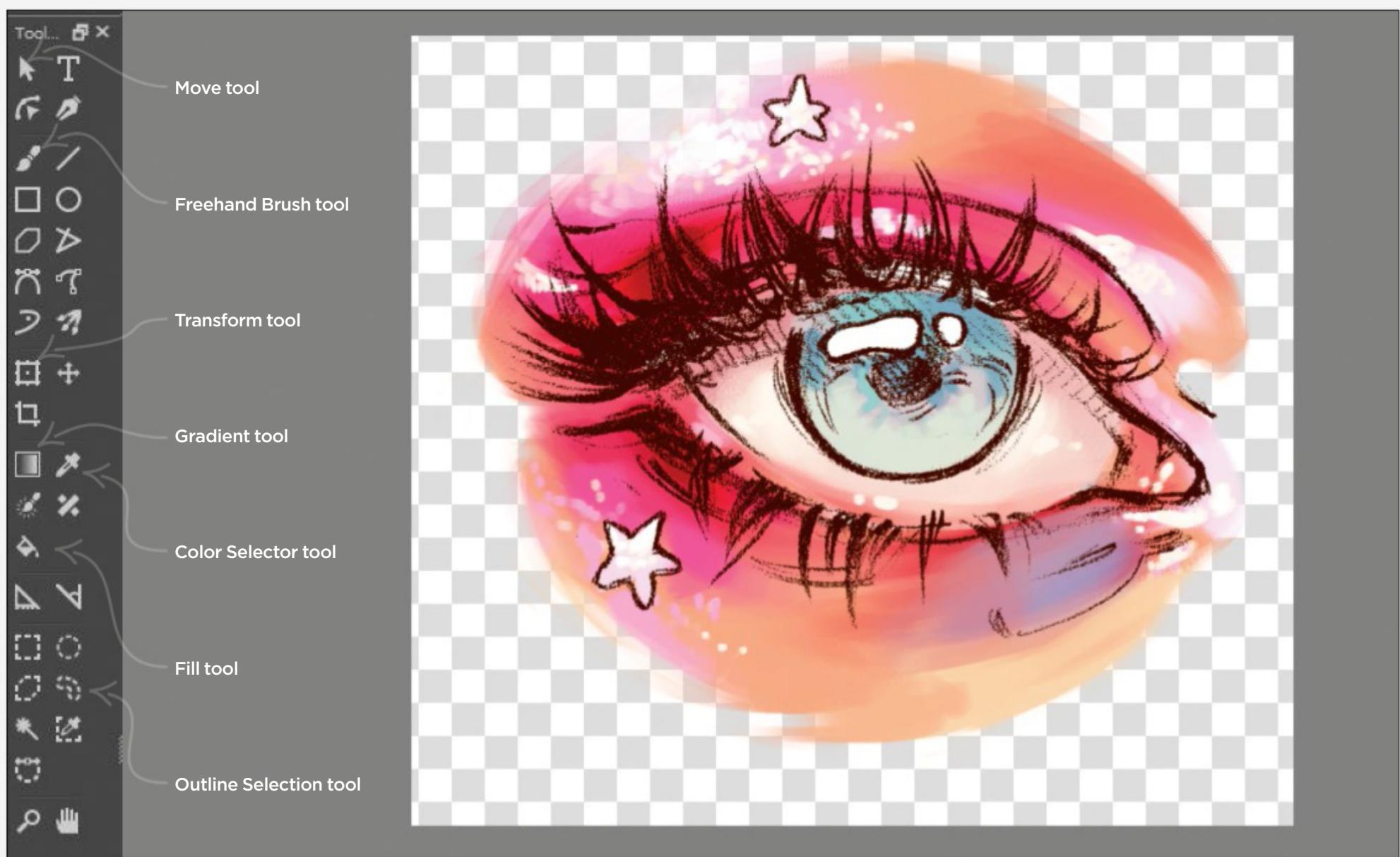
Krita is one of the best free painting programs available and includes a great variety of tools and features. While Photoshop has features that can be useful from painting to photo retouching to photo manipulation, too many options create a tough learning curve for a digital painter.

Krita keeps its interface painter friendly with a clean style and minimal distractions. Tools are accessibly placed, and most of the window is dedicated to the canvas. Since Krita has such a gentle learning curve, it's easy – and important – to familiarise yourself with its features before diving into the painting process.



1 Creating a new document

Open up a new document by going to File>New. To control the size of the canvas, you can select from one of the templates in the Predefined drop-down menu, or either change the dimensions yourself. Choose either pixels or inches for your dimensions and set the canvas size to the ratio you want. I prefer a larger file size, no smaller than 3,000px on the shortest size but no larger than 7,000px on the longest. Finally, set your Resolution either to 300 or 600; the higher resolution, the greater quality for the final image.

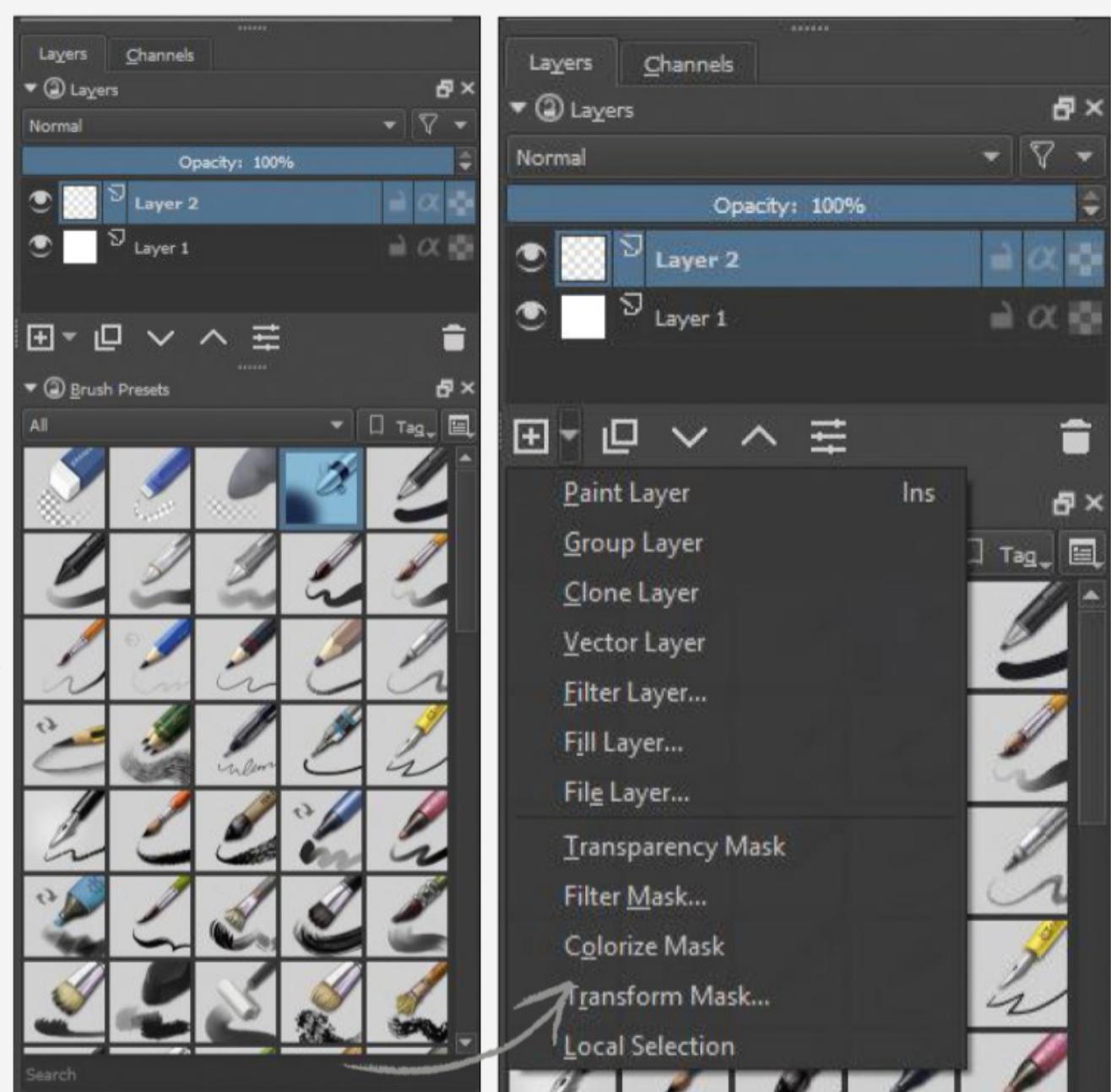


2 The left toolbar

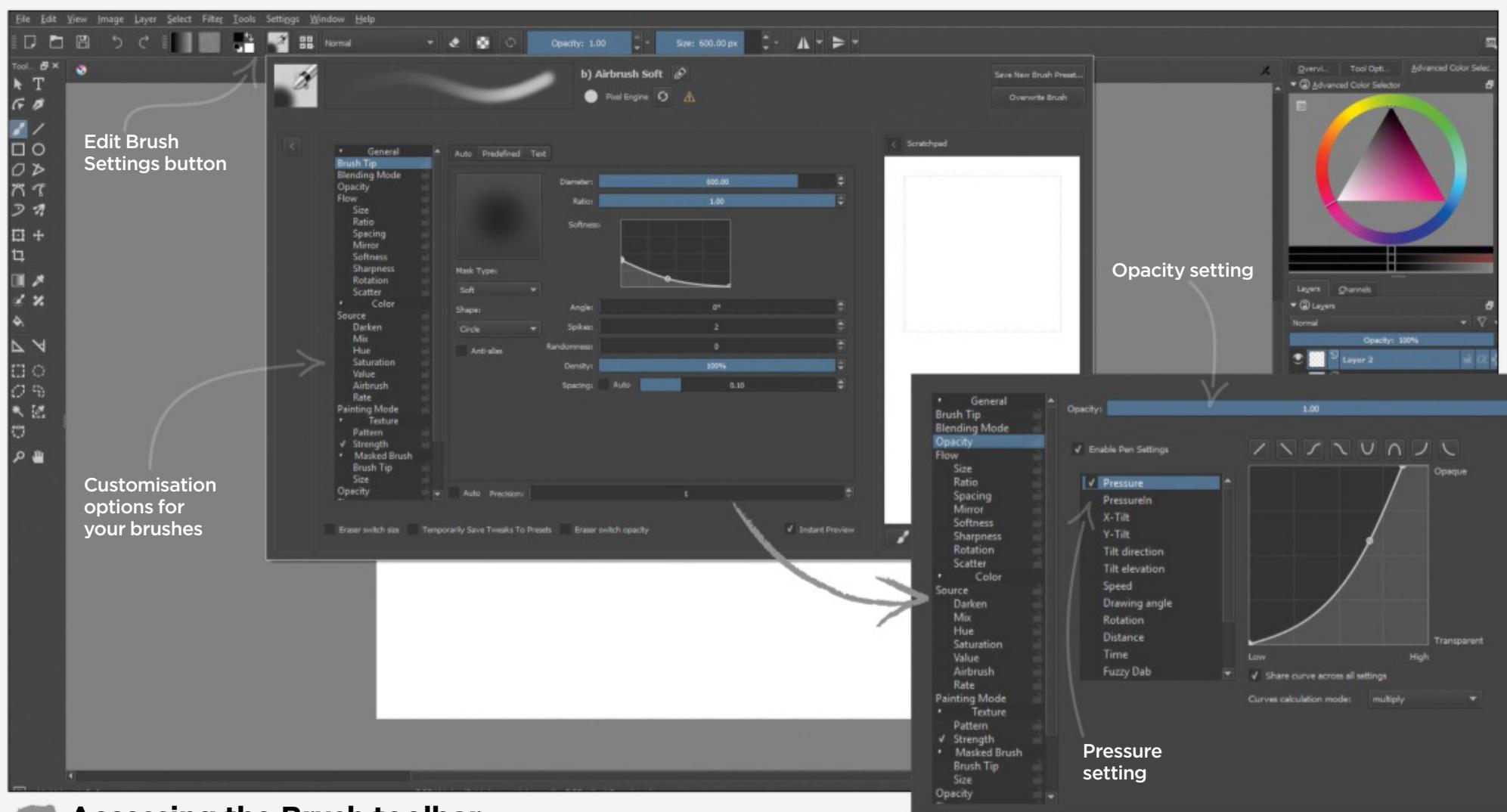
On the left-hand side is the Toolbar. I'll be pointing out some of the tools you're likely to use the most. The Freehand Brush tool is what you're going to be doing all your painting and drawing with. Underneath that, the Transform tool is a handy feature for selecting and changing the size or shape of a section. The Gradient tool and Fill tool are useful for filling in large sections with colour, and the Color Selector tool is necessary for blending when painting. The Outline Selection tool make selecting a specific part of your piece easy, and is often used in conjunction with the Transform tool.

3 The right toolbar

On the right-hand toolbar is the Advanced Color Selector, Layers panel, and Brush Presets. Using a colour wheel makes shifting hues easy, as well as useful for setting up complementary tones. The Layers panel enables you to create either new paint, mask, or filter layers, giving you full control of your canvas. Lastly, the Brush Presets makes it possible to quickly look through and select brushes. You can filter by types of brushes, or select your favourites for quick access. ➤

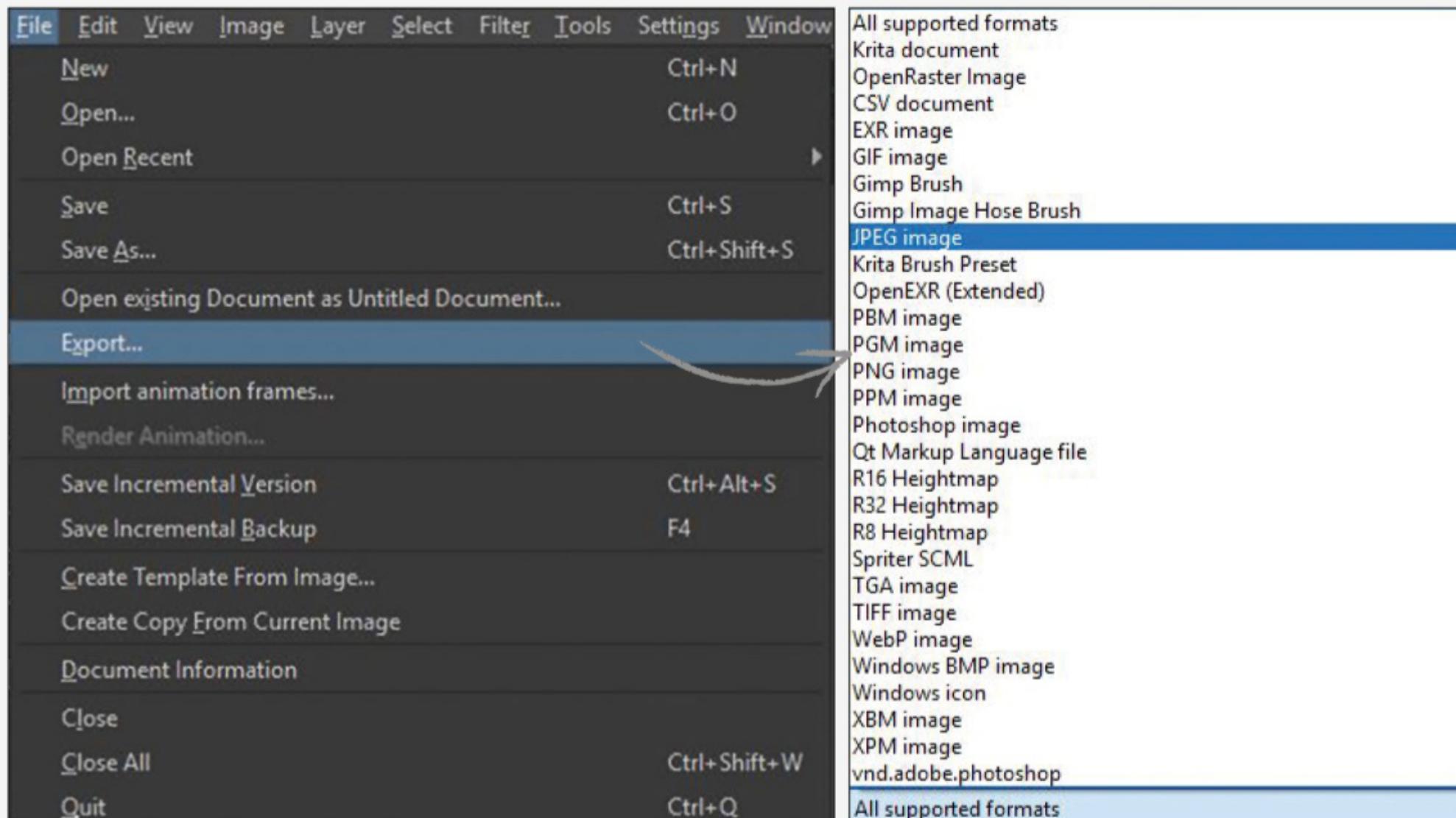


Workshops



4 Accessing the Brush toolbar

By selecting the Freehand Brush tool and clicking the Edit Brush Settings button on the top toolbar, you'll see a large variety of customisation options for your selected brush. The two features that you'll mostly be using will be the Opacity and Size filters. Make sure that Pressure is selected for either of them, depending on what kind of brush you're using, so that Krita syncs up to your tablet properly.



5 Saving your image

When you're ready to save your canvas, go to File>Export and select your preferred file type. I usually stick to JPEG format unless I'm exporting a file with transparency, in which case I'll use a PNG file and make sure I have an alpha channel selected.

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Dreams & Photoshop

BUILD A HOME IN VIRTUAL REALITY



Martin Nebelong brings a world to life using Dreams, a virtual reality video game for PlayStation 4, where anything is possible!

Artist PROFILE

Martin Nebelong

LOCATION: Denmark

Martin is a Danish freelance artist and the artistic director of MasterpieceVR. He's made it his duty to explore new ways of making art... on a gaming console for example! <https://ifxm.ag/martin-n>



We live in a time where the tools available to artists are constantly evolving at a rapid rate of knots. Artificial intelligence and machine learning can help us in our work, and we have virtual reality tools that enable us walk around and work in our own sculptures and paintings. Here, I'll show you how to make art on your PlayStation 4. It's a concept that still sounds a little strange to me, but one that works surprisingly well!

I first heard about the software Dreams when I watched a developer talk at Umbra Ignite in 2015 by Alex Evans. Alex is the co-founder of the Sony-owned company Media Molecule, which made the hit title Little Big Planet. Dreams is a continuation of some of the ideas present in Little Big Planet, in which players build levels and content for the game. Dreams expands on this theme, with an even wider scope of what's possible to build in the software. You're basically provided

with all you need to create games, illustrations or even full-length movies either from scratch or with some of the content that's shared by other creators. All this is packaged into a video game-like experience that's very user-friendly.

If you haven't done so already, I recommend that you go through and finish all the basic tutorials in Dreams, before tackling this workshop. I'm using Move controllers in this tutorial, which I think work better than the DualShocks.

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See page 8 now!



1 Visualise my idea

I start out with a rough concept in Photoshop. My idea for this piece is to build a diorama-like environment that showcases what a wizard's quirky hideaway might look like. In this case, we have a floating rock, with a small house and garden on it. The style of the scene is inspired by my childhood readings of classic European comic books such as Asterix and The Smurfs.

2 Mocking up the scene

Time to boot up the PS4. The first thing we want to do in Dreams is to get the large shapes right before even considering going into details. I use the basic Cube Stamp tool set to Smear and paint in the shape of the large floating rock. I switch between Add and Subtract by bumping the top of the left motion sensor against the bottom of the right one. ►

In depth Virtual reality



Workshops



3 Painting the floating rock

Once I'm happy with the overall shape of the rock I can go in and add a bit of colour and colour variation to make the shape look more interesting. I use the Spray Paint tool for this, and you can find this tool when in Sculpting mode under the Tools category. Play around with the Opacity and Soft Blend settings in this mode, and experiment with different tool shapes and with painting from inside the model and out.



4 Building the house

When it comes to creating architecture in Dreams, you'll often need to use the Guide tools. In this case I'm using the Upright Guide, which makes sure that my shapes are just that: upright! I'm still making things loosely, knowing that I'll refine everything later. I use mostly the Square tool for this step, and I change the shape as I go along by bumping the top of each motion sensor against each other.



5 More sketching

The inhabitant of the house needs a place to go and read spell books without any interruption, so I make a small house for this and other more natural needs at the little cliff to the side of the main rock. I sculpt this using basic tools, and then sculpt a small tree next to it. I use the Curve tool and use the Edit Shape function to produce a suitable shape for the trunk and branches. For the foliage, I just use a big Round Clay brush and squash the shape a bit by first bumping the top of both controllers against each other and then tweaking the shape.



6 Adding details to the wizard's house

Next up we need elements such as fences in strategic positions, a small flight of stairs up to the little house and other minor details. I use a combination of approaches, such as directly cloning items, or cloning and going into individual copies to alter details and break any repetitive features. In this example, you can see how the flight of stairs is made up of just one stair element that I've cloned multiple times.



7 Making use of the Looseness tool and generating texture

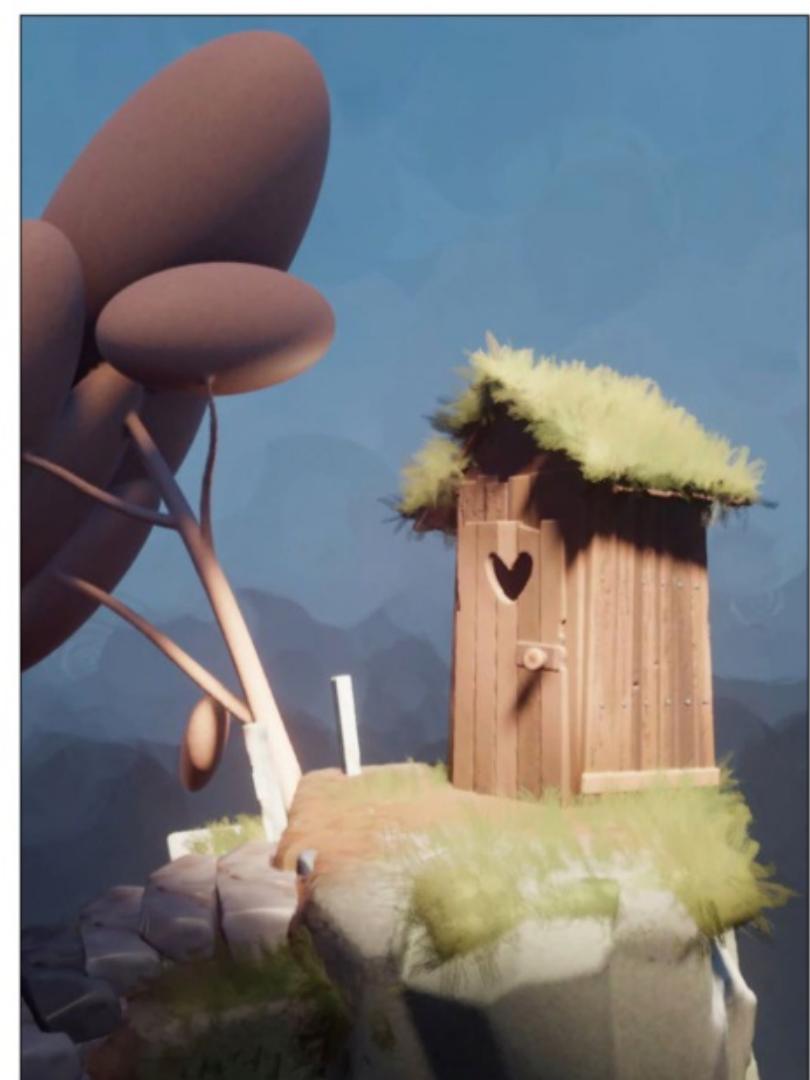
When you're zoomed into a model, you have various tools to choose from under the Tools menu. One of them is the Looseness tool, and it's only recently that I discovered how useful this tool is for giving objects more texture. The tool enables you to locally change the spacing between so-called flecks in your model. All elements in Dreams are covered by these flecks, and their effects can range from a fluffy appearance to a completely hard-surface look. By painting over your model with the Looseness tool set to a high value, you can smooth out rough edges or give objects the impression of wear and tear. ➔

Workshops



8 Copying and repurposing elements

If you draw and sculpt every element in your scene as individual, highly detailed objects, you'll quickly hit the limit of the Thermometer. This is an important tool that enables you to gain a quick overview of what elements in your scene could benefit from being optimised. You can activate the Thermometer in the Guides section of your tool bar. Alternatively, you could choose to sculpt a few detailed elements and then clone them. You'd then be able to carry on almost indefinitely without receiving much feedback from the Thermometer. And by rotating, mirroring, scaling and styling these elements, rock can be turned into stone, stone to water, and so on.



9 Installing the picket fence around the perimeter

I switch to the Cube tool to make the fence, editing the tool until it matches the proportions of one of the wooden boards. Then I stamp it in place with Guides enabled to make sure it's angled correctly. Next, I use the Cube tool in Subtract mode to create a pointed end. I turn on Surface Snapping in the Guides and use a small brush to sculpt in the details of the wood, before colouring it with the Spray Color tool. I repeat this process for the other elements in the fence and then clone away!

10 Constructing the little house

I start building the smaller house, employing the same technique that I used for the fence. I use the rough mock-up of the building as a guide, and lay boards on top of that until all of the walls are covered. I make sure to generate enough colour variation to make the building look interesting, and add small nails to the boards using a combination of the Sphere Clay tool and clone-repeating.



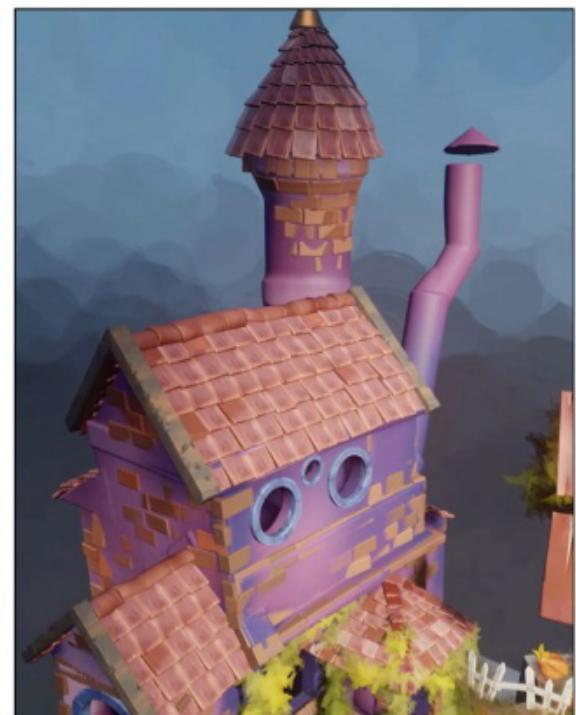
11 Building the main house

I only intended to use the mock-up of the main house as a sketch of sorts, but I end up referring to it directly in the process of making the final model. I create bricks on a new Sculpt layer and position them along the surface of the mockup. I open the Color Wheel by bumping the left controller sphere against the bottom of the right one and drag a few colour variations into the Color Mixer. I then drag on the colour "blob" with the trigger of my right hand. This will make your brush cycle through the colours, which adds a little bit of variation.



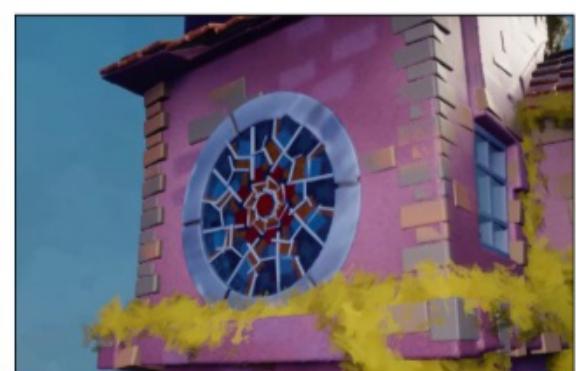
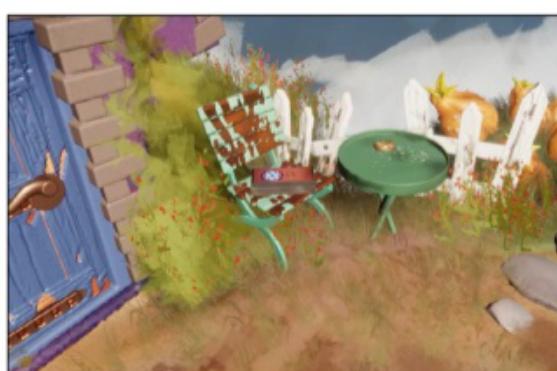
12 Placing roof tiles

The process of adding the roof tiles is a bit different than the one we went through for the bricks. Here I sculpt one roof tile and add some dents and colour to it. I make sure to also model and colour the reverse of the tile, because we'll be reusing this for most of the roof. By rotating the model, changing the sculpt properties and mirroring the model we can cover a lot of ground with very few models. I use cloning a lot here, and then manually go in and reposition elements afterwards. This helps to make the rooftops look more natural and varied.



13 Lighting in Dreams

One of the most interesting and useful features of Dreams is its light systems. The ease at which Dreams seems to handle soft shadows, multiple light sources, fog and so on is a joy to behold. I usually sculpt my models in a neutral light in the initial stages, and then refine the lighting when I'm satisfied with the overall shapes. If you find that you need to see your scene in a neutral light later on, turn on the Studio Light option in the Guides menu.



14 Adding final details to the composition

One of the key points about Dreams is to share your content with other creators as much as possible, and depending on your project you'll probably be able to find a lot of useful assets that have already been made by other Dreamers. For this project though, I wanted to make everything myself to demonstrate the software's ease of use. I did import a few elements from some of my earlier Dreams work, though: a chair, table and a spell book. Because everything in Dreams is editable down to the smallest clay or brush strokes, even elements from other users can be remixed and styled to match the look of your own scene.

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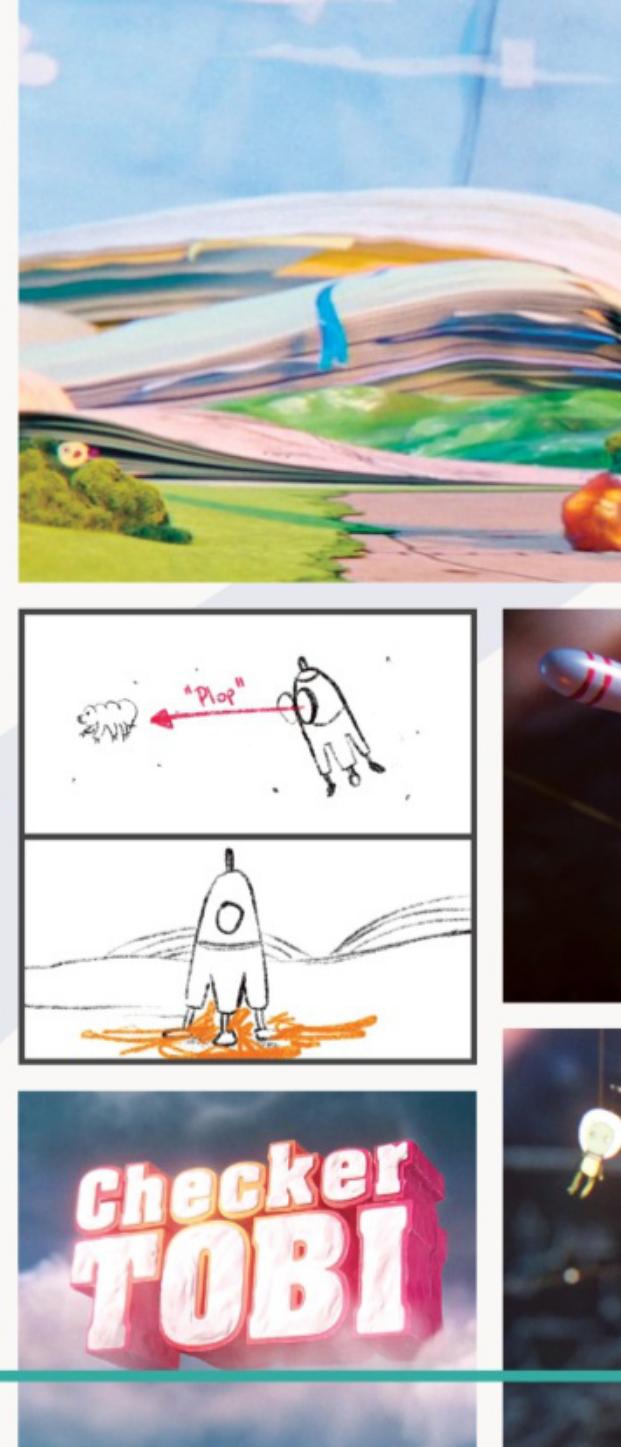
Siggraph is the annual convention for those involved or interested in computer graphics, virtual reality, animation and emerging technologies.

Held at the Los Angeles Convention Center, in the heart of one of the world's creative hubs, the show is a celebration of advancements and achievements in CG, highlighting the best visual effects in the latest movies and animations, scientific developments that have or soon will make it into our favourite software tools, and the people who make this all a reality, from the brains behind the tech to the ambassadors who spread the word.

As the biggest show of its kind, the number of sponsors and partners is too long to list, but over the following pages you will find stories highlighting some of the best work from a select few of them.



After modelling a globe in C4D, Aixsponza used handmade illustrations to create the film's kid-inspired Earth



CASE STUDY

A BELOVED CHILDREN'S SHOW HITS THE BIG SCREEN

Aixsponza on creating animations for *Checker Tobi* and the Secret of Our Planet

Learning can be fun if you make it that way, and that's probably why *Checker Tobi* is so popular. Produced for German television, the children's show is hosted by Tobi, an exuberant young man who checks out ideas and questions in exciting ways that spark kids' curiosity. *Checker Tobi* is such a hit, its creators decided to take the show to the big screen ([youtube.com/watch?v=GLGSPne-Vrl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLGSPne-Vrl)) for a feature-length exploration of the secret to life on Earth – water.

Knowing how animation-heavy the film would be, German production company Megaherz teamed up with renowned 3D design studio Aixsponza (aixsponza.com) to create roughly 15 minutes of motion graphics and VFX for the film's explanatory sequences. Matthias Zabiegly, Aixsponza's 3D lead and set supervisor, headed up the studio's team who primarily relied on Cinema 4D, ZBrush and Houdini while working on the film on and off for nearly nine months.

This was Aixsponza's first opportunity to work on a feature film. And although the team had a great time helping to create Tobi's animated world, it was even more fun to see how kids reacted at the premiere. "That was such a great experience, seeing our work so well received by the audience, especially the children who were cheering and laughing," Zabiegly recalls. "The kids really saw all of the little details, like the birds dancing and having a party, and all of the other tiny things we did that were happening on the side of the screen." (See all the shots Aixsponza created in collaboration with Megaherz here: vimeo.com/318420020.)

GOING FOR A HANDMADE LOOK

Before collaborating on this project, Megaherz worked with Aixsponza on several smaller jobs, including medical visualisations and TV show openers. Looking back, Zabiegly thinks those served as test projects that gave Megaherz

the confidence to tap them for a full-length feature. It helped, too, that both companies are based in Munich and use a lot of the same software, like Cinema 4D.

Work began with a briefing led by Megaherz animation director Robert Mayer, who explained that the visuals needed to look like someone who knew what they were doing made them at home. "Not something a five-year-old put together in some weird, awkward way," Zabiegly explains. "More like something maybe a really talented 16-year-old would make." Though Aixsponza usually storyboards in 3D, conceiving began with Megaherz doing rough drawings on paper. Once those were finalised with director Martin Tischner, Zabiegly's team started doing layouts in 3D.

"Robert had some ideas in his head that weren't in the storyboards, so we worked together on layouts," Zabiegly says. "It was nice because he was very open to creative feedback, like if we said something looked



The tardigrade's rocket takes off while a group of aliens and birds watch from the sidelines. See the Houdini simulation for the rocket launch here: vimeo.com/318219607



It took a lot of experimenting during the weight painting process to get the tardigrade's belly area to look right

good on a storyboard but wouldn't translate well in the 3D world." In keeping with the handmade look, they talked about stop-motion but decided against trying to fake it in 3D. Instead, they opted to take advantage of feature film's 24 frames and give traditional 3D animation a handmade look by adding a lot of details and irregularities, like fingerprints, scratches and visible brushstrokes. "Everything you would see in real-life handicraft was put into these 3D scenes, including sticky tape, and you even can see cracks, tears and pen marks," Zabiegly says.

MAKING COMPLEX TOPICS INTERESTING AND FUN

Normally, *Checker Tobi* is a 30-minute production, so extrapolating the series into a 90-minute film required a more complicated storyline. *Checker Tobi and the Secret of Our Planet* begins with Tobi aboard a ship fighting pirates. After falling into the sea, he finds a riddle in a bottle. To solve it, viewers must go with him on a journey to a volcanic island in the Pacific, the Arctic, beneath the sea and into space. While this adventure looks kid-friendly, themes that it touches on – Earth's origin, the Ice Age, climate change – were complex and based on real-life science.

Working together, Aixsponza and Megaherz focused on creating motion graphics and VFX that helped explain the science while also keeping children engaged with what was happening on screen. "Megaherz understood that if you do a feature film for kids, parts of the story need to be shorter so they can follow what's happening," Zabiegly explains. "We also added in lots of funny little details so kids who weren't following the story exactly could still say, 'Oh look Mum, a lion,' and be happy."

To keep things moving smoothly in the editor, Aixsponza built everything as simply as possible in Cinema 4D. As he does with most projects, Zabiegly began by making art boards for inspiration by collecting images online of specific things he and his team needed to make. In this case, a rocket, a whole lot of toys and a train: "I really like to pull images from the internet and put them together into a big Photoshop document, so I can go in there and circle what I want and say, 'Okay, I like this part of the rocket, and this exhaust thingy and that other part' and then put it all together using Volumes," he explains.

A new feature in Cinema 4D's R20, Volumes allowed Zabiegly to rapidly model shapes that were more organic, with softer surfaces and/or rounded or beveled edges. He used Volumes for all of the toys seen in the film, including the train, which took him just 20 minutes to complete after starting with an empty scene. "I've been doing this for 20 years, so that helps, but it

before being put on planes in Cinema 4D. Mossy-looking forest areas on the globe were created with C4D's Hair. Individual hairs were shaped and shaded for a fluffy, felted look, which added a lot of depth to the scenes. To make the globe lively and less static, Aixsponza also added crashing ocean waves, which were made using Sweep Objects and moved by posemorphs and animated displacers.

The rocket that launched into space with the tiny tardigrade inside started out as a drawing too, its handmade look accentuated by the actual brushstrokes Zabiegly put on its side, as if a kid had just finished painting it. For the rocket, he used traditional poly modelling techniques, starting with the rough shape that was improved during the approval process.

Aixsponza's team used Cinema 4D and ZBrush to create the tardigrade, an eight-legged micro-animal that Tobi finds living in a bit of moss while investigating what lives underwater. In a scene based on a real NASA study, they launch the little guy into space to show how tough he is. "They're very sturdy creatures," Zabiegly says, explaining how NASA used tardigrades at the International Space Station for research aimed at developing a better understanding of how humans can cope with the stress of space.

To keep things simple, Aixsponza made the tardigrade's rig as uncomplicated as possible. Weighting, though, was a bit more challenging because all of the creature's folds, wrinkles and creases

made it difficult to auto-rig. And because the team kind of fell in love with the tardigrade, which is also known as a water bear, once the base mesh was finished they sent it off to a 3D printer so they could hold their creation in their hands. "That was really fun and motivating, especially for the guy who sculpted it, and now we have him sitting on a shelf here," Zabiegly says. "We would definitely do that again if we make another cute creature." (Learn more here: vimeo.com/318228172.)

The film ends by circling back to the theme of water as Tobi makes a stop in Mumbai. Aixsponza's challenge was to render his notebook in the pouring rain. (Learn more about that scene here: vimeo.com/318230491.) "We did the simulations in Houdini and then brought everything into Cinema 4D and rendered in Octane to get the right look," Zabiegly explains. "Everyone is glad that it's raining, and the scene really brings home the idea that water is so important to all living things."

Meleah Maynard is a writer and editor in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"EVERYTHING YOU WOULD SEE IN REAL-LIFE HANDICRAFT WAS PUT INTO THESE 3D SCENES"

Matthias Zabiegly, 3D lead, Aixsponza

was easy to put together after I gathered the collection of shapes that I wanted from the references I pulled," he recalls.

ADDING A LOT OF LOVE

One of the reasons Aixsponza enjoyed working on this project so much was that they had the time they needed to add love. "There was no big rush, so we got to add in all kinds of high-level detail," Zabiegly says. "It's pretty basic modelling and texturing, but we were able to put a lot of love into this and it shows, and we're really happy about that." Plasticine volcanoes were modelled from a cube in C4D and textured to highlight fissures and steaming lava. The beautiful blue Earth is covered with trees, lions, dolphins, birds, elephants and other creatures that began as pen-and-pencil drawings by illustrators



CASE STUDY

TOR FRICK: DESIGN WITHOUT LIMITS

Modo's flexible modelling tools and AMD's powerful hardware help the leading games artist meet the punishing production schedule at his start-up studio, Neon Giant

Throughout more than a decade of AAA game development, Modo has been a constant in Tor Frick's life. Regarded as one of the leading artists in the industry, Frick has used Foundry's creative 3D modelling software since the very start of his career.

Today, Modo forms the heart of the art pipeline at Neon Giant, the studio that Frick co-founded in 2018, where the improved modelling tools and Radeon™ ProRender GPU render engine in the new Modo 13 Series – backed up by AMD's powerful Radeon™ Pro Duo graphics cards and massively multi-core Ryzen™ Threadripper CPUs – help him meet the often brutal development schedule for the company's debut game: an as-yet-unannounced cyberpunk title.

MODELED IN MODO

"We're doing pretty much all our modelling in Modo, from weapons and characters to [entire] environments," says Frick. "Modo is well suited to game art

because it's so easy to swap between different types of modelling, like subdivision surfaces and low-poly work. It's all seamless."

Frick, who describes his long-term goal as "to blur the line between concept art and production art" also uses Modo in his wider role as Neon Giant's art director, using the software's procedural modelling tools and non-destructive Boolean system to quickly explore designs for new assets.

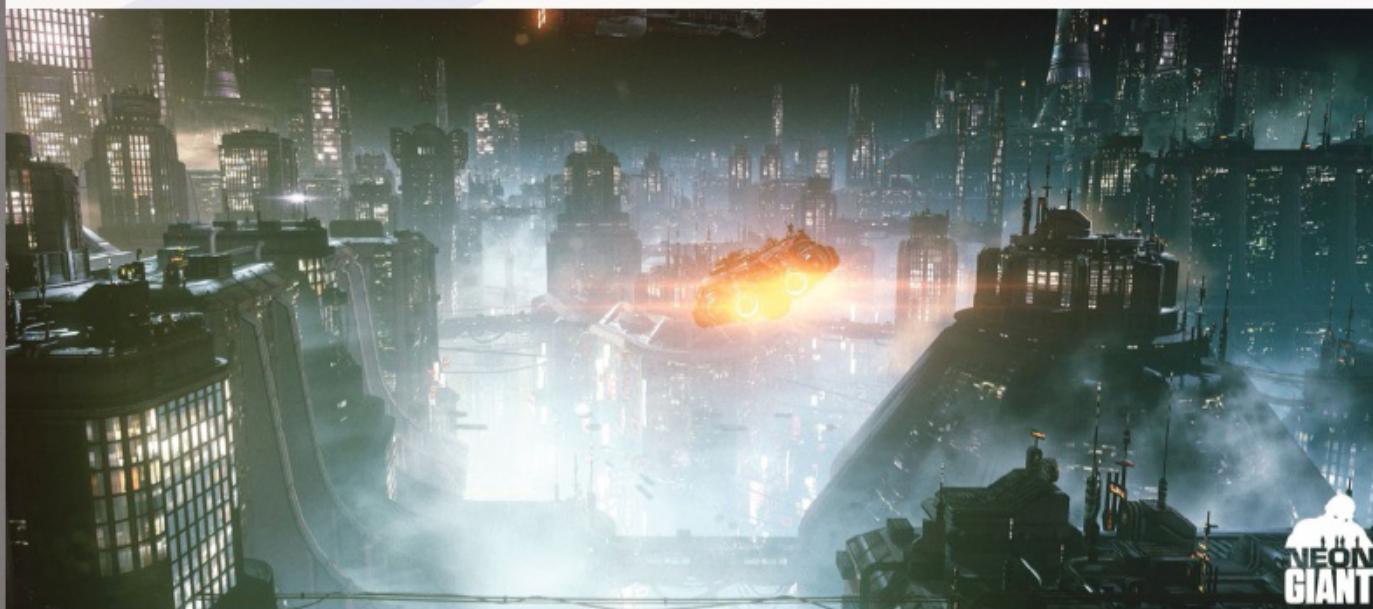
"You can drag things around [on screen] and come up with whatever crazy mechanical shapes you want," he says. "At the end, you get a very clean result that you can put directly in-game."

Neon Giant now uses the Modo 13 Series, Foundry's current cycle of updates to the software, in production, with Frick praising the changes it brings to the direct modelling toolset, particularly the new Find Shortest Path Selection tool and improved handling of falloffs. "Anything that speeds up core modelling workflows

■ RADEON PRORENDER

Modo's GPU render engine helps Tor Frick preview assets accurately

First introduced in Modo 13.0, AMD's Radeon ProRender is a fast, physically accurate GPU render engine. It quickly became part of Tor Frick's workflow, enabling him to see photorealistic previews of the models he is working on, rather than just relying on the simplified versions that are visible in the viewport. "Being able to see how things look with real materials, not just grey-shaded, means a lot to me," he says. "A model can look correct in the viewport, but completely different in-game. The faster I can preview things the way they're going to look later, the better."



Main: Modo's real-time Booleans and procedural modelling tools help Frick take assets like this sci-fi weapon from initial concept to final model in hours

Above: Neon Giant, which Frick co-founded in 2018, is currently working on an unannounced cyberpunk title

"MODO IS WELL SUITED TO GAME ART, IT'S EASY TO SWAP BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF MODELLING"

Tor Frick, co-founder, Neon Giant

is great for me," he says. "Before, I didn't dare to design things as complicated as I do now because they would have been too hard to model."

POWERED BY AMD

Another major new feature in the Modo 13 Series is Radeon™ ProRender, AMD's physically based GPU renderer, which Frick uses to visualise his designs in real time. Although ProRender works with any graphics card that supports OpenCL 1.2 or Metal 2, across Windows, macOS and Linux, Frick's own workstation is equipped with two AMD Radeon Pro Duo GPUs.

With a peak single-precision floating-point performance of 11.5 TFlops and 32GB of memory each, the Radeon Pro Duo cards have four of the same GPUs as a Radeon Pro WX7100, providing the power that Frick needs to manipulate complex subdivided geometry seamlessly on screen. "[As well as using ProRender] I do relatively complex things in the Advanced viewport, and I like to keep things ultra-smooth when I work," he says.

Neon Giant also uses AMD CPUs in production, from "regular workstation Ryzen™ [processors to] the very sauciest Ryzen™ Threadripper™ chips". With up to 32 cores per processor, AMD's second-generation Ryzen Threadripper CPUs give artists the freedom to work simultaneously

in multiple applications, maximising production efficiency.

"[As well as Modo], we're using Unreal Engine, and of course, all of the programmers are compiling code," says Frick. "We use every core we can get."

AAA DESIGN FROM AN INDIE TEAM

Frick describes the experience of going from a large studio to an 11-person start-up as "fantastic, but terrifying", with Neon Games' founders striving to apply AAA standards of quality to a project with much more limited resources.

"As a smaller team, you could just build fewer assets," he says. "But in our case, we're doing the opposite – we're just trying to make everything really, really quickly. I don't think I've spent more than a couple of days on any model in the game, from the very first idea to the finished product."

Modo's fast, flexible modelling workflows, backed by the processing power of AMD's hardware, help Frick to stick to this punishing development schedule, day in, day out.

"We need a phenomenal number of assets, so we've built our art pipeline around that," he says. "Pretty much that entire pipeline revolves around Modo. It's at the heart of everything we do."

See Tor Frick and Neon Giant's work at artstation.com/snefer and neongiant.se

■ WHAT'S NEW IN MODO 13.1?

Speed boosts and new tools help artists create more complex models

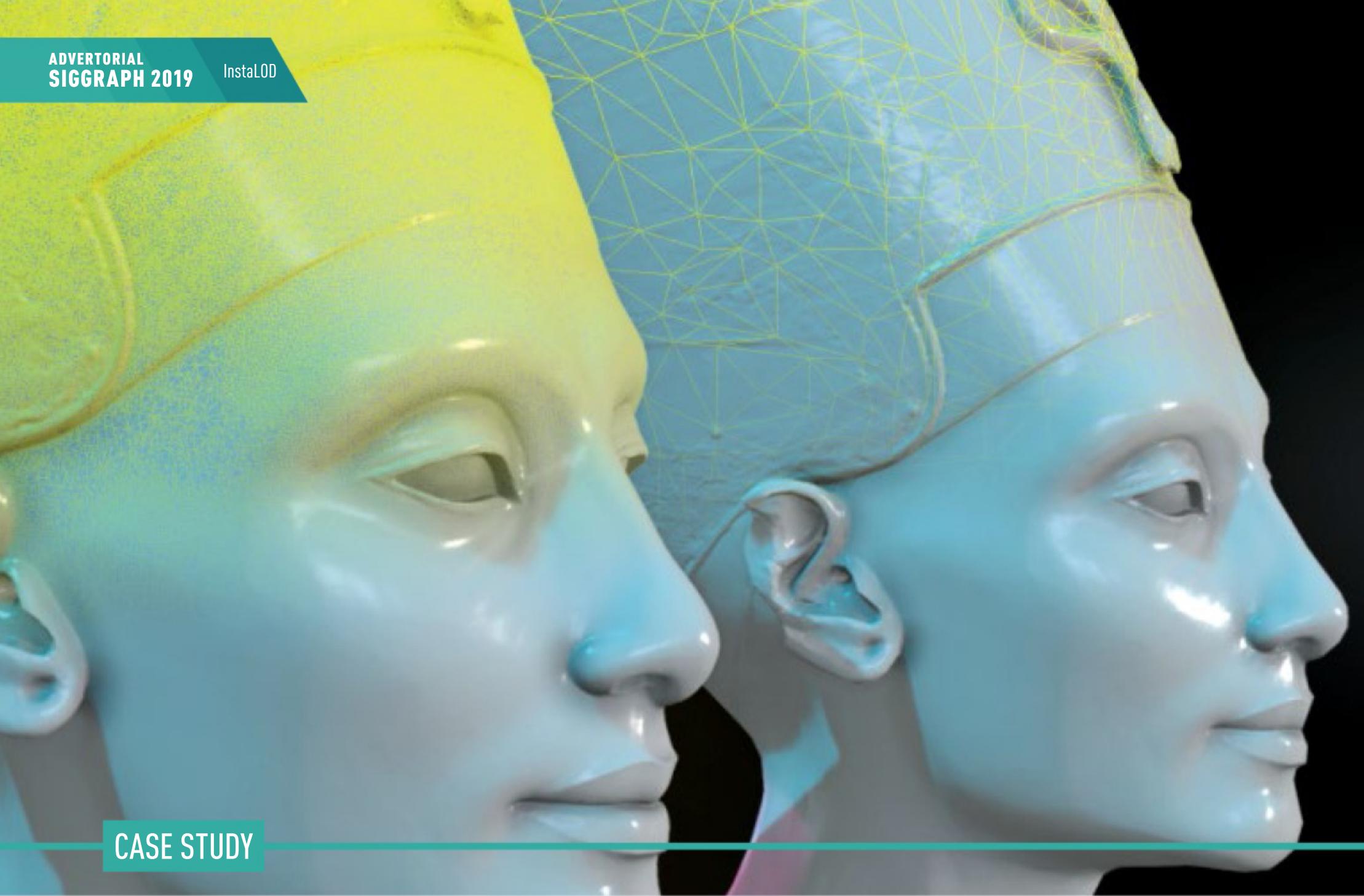
Modo 13.1, the latest release in Foundry's Modo 13 Series, brings with it significant improvements in performance, particularly when working with the kind of assets that Neon Giant creates in production. The process of converting mesh geometry into a surface that can be drawn to the screen is now up to four times faster, really accelerating animation playback.

Multi-threading has also been optimised, enabling artists to make better use of the power provided by high-core-count processors like AMD's Ryzen™ Threadripper™ CPUs. The speed boost makes it possible to manipulate complex meshes with multiple deformers interactively in the viewport.

Modo's modelling tools continue to evolve, with a new Tool States Presets system enabling artists to save and reuse custom settings, and new options for creating bevels, selecting and thickening geometry, and for transferring vertex information between meshes. MeshFusion, Modo's real-time Boolean system, can now create surface strips from curves, while the procedural modelling toolset gets a range of new Mesh Operations, including Curve Sweep and Flip UV.

Further down the production pipeline, animators get a new Morph Container system, which enables morph relationships to be created independently of meshes, making it easier to transfer sets of corrective blendshapes from one character rig to another.

Modo's Advanced viewport has also been updated, with support for progressive anti-aliasing, raising frame rates when navigating complex scenes, plus improved display of ambient occlusion, shadows and area lights. In addition, the software can now import and display many shaders in AxF format, X-Rite's popular standard for exchanging material data between CAD applications, while AMD's Radeon™ ProRender renderer gets a number of bug fixes, and can now output alpha channels.



CASE STUDY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR THE CREATION AND AUTOMATIC OPTIMISATION OF 3D CONTENT

Easily achieve more than 10x in cost-savings when creating new assets or optimising existing data with revolutionary workflows

InstaLOD transforms the cumbersome and complex task of 3D asset creation and optimisation into a process that can be achieved on the go or even fully automated. Its multi-faceted feature set can be implemented in virtually every case of 3D asset creation. These functions include award-winning polygon optimisation technology, skeletal mesh optimisation, remeshing technology and much more besides.

The technology casts a wide net in the growing shift towards 3D production. Users cover a broad spectrum from gaming, VFX, aerospace, architecture, consumer goods and more. These unique features have also made InstaLOD the go-to solution for all major branches of the 3D industry. Much-needed relief is

provided through CAD workflows that link as well as automatically import scene import rules and data regeneration capabilities.

For the entertainment industry InstaLOD enables the transformation of raw kit-bashed items, as well as available data from previous projects, into realtime-ready assets in mere minutes. Features such as polygon optimisation, remeshing, draw-call reduction, automatic UV unwrapping and texture baking helps to ensure the most cost-efficient retopology possible.

MASTERS OF THE REMASTER

Bluepoint Games has built a reputation for creating some of the best remastered games in recent years. With critically

acclaimed titles like *Shadow of the Colossus*, the studio has become a household name in the industry. Remastered games demand a larger number of assets to help with the increased level of detail. With the help of InstaLOD, Bluepoint is able to create a large number of assets much more efficiently.

Shortly after integrating InstaLOD into their production process, the studio started to rely on the technology for many parts of their asset creation process. InstaLOD's remeshing and occlusion culling features are now used to automatically convert kit-bashed assets into realtime-ready assets, saving hours of manual labour. This workflow enables the developer to produce more assets



at heavily reduced time and cost per game asset.

Bluepoint has also automated the creation of LODs in their pipeline by integrating the InstaLOD C++ SDK. The inline nature of their pipeline allows the artists to simply export their highest-level model, and an automated system will generate the necessary assets on a separate set of servers.

In an effort to reduce the number of draw calls per scene, Bluepoint has developed an automated method for combining multiple assets into one. The automated system picks up these new combo models and leverages InstaLOD to produce a highly optimised asset. This provides the artists with another method of kit-bashing larger models into different configurations, further improving efficiency and productivity.

3D WITH STYLE

Deckers Brands' fashion and performance lifestyle footwear has earned a global reputation for unparalleled style, quality and comfort. Their portfolio boasts the likes of UGG, Hoka One One, Teva and Sanuk, while their products are sold in more than 50 countries. Over the past three years, Deckers have taken steps to modernise their commercial presence. In order to streamline their design and

development process, the company turned to CAD modelling. Relying on 3D processes enables Deckers to reduce the time and cost of producing high-quality footwear.

One of the challenges inherent in CAD-based workflows is the large number of polygons involved, which can make using the resulting assets downstream for e-commerce applications or VR/XR experiences a painful process. This is due to the need to have low-polygon assets for both data delivery and real-time visualisations. The requirement for high visual fidelity coupled with a desire to target a wide spectrum of devices meant Deckers needed a solution to automatically process large amounts of data without compromising on visual quality.

The team was delighted by InstaLOD's ability to quickly produce beautiful tessellations and once the digital shoe was refined to a workable mesh, the team began experimenting with the groundbreaking remeshing technology. At the push of a button, a complete retopology could be achieved. On top of that, a large number of materials were automatically reduced to a single one.

With their new pipeline now in place, Deckers can quickly adapt any of their products' CAD data to every platform,

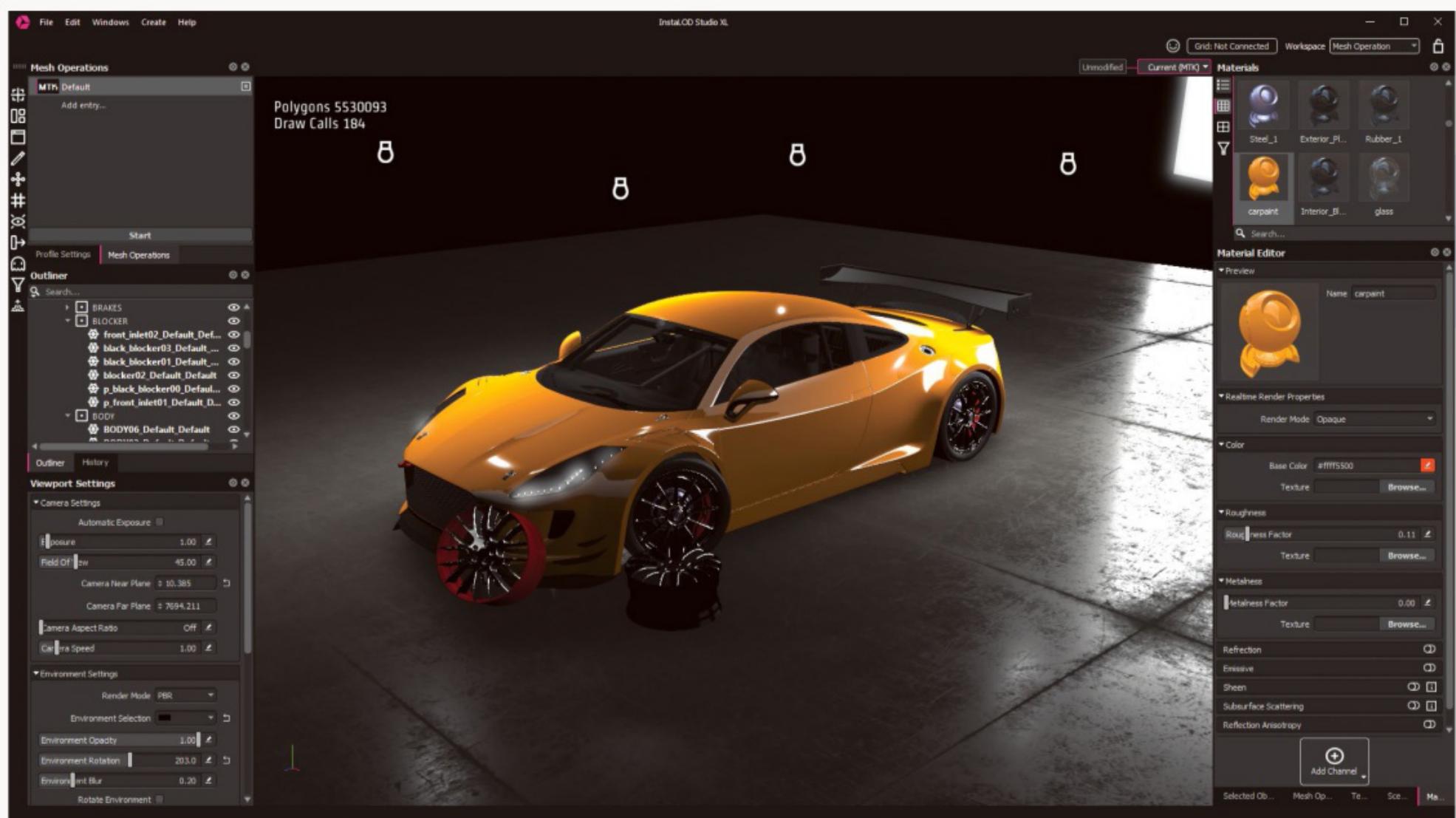
■ WAR GAMES

How InstaLOD supercharged a AAA game studio's asset pipeline and brought one of their blockbuster titles to multiple platforms

Since *World of Tanks* launched on consoles in 2014, Wargaming has added over 900 tanks to the popular game. Generating this amount of content and optimising it to run on the decade-old hardware of the Xbox 360 is no mean feat. The tank optimisation process took an average of two to three days per tank, and a typical monthly update for their title could require anywhere from four to over 100 tanks to be reprocessed by a team of three artists.

Much of this heavy lifting has been taken care of by InstaLOD's remeshing and optimisation features. Both InstaLOD's remeshing and optimisation can handle skinned meshes, meaning artists were able to save valuable time not having to reskin tanks that had complex suspension rigs.

After integrating InstaLOD into their pipeline to make full use of automation, the studio was able to cut the time to a mere four hours. "InstaLOD allows us to spend more time on making the art look the best that it can and less time optimising," says TJ Wagner, executive producer. "It has become an important facet to our tank production pipeline."



saving a minimum of half a day per model of processing time. Due to InstaLOD's user interface and experience, the team was able to understand the software within just an hour of training. "Our prayers were quickly answered when we heard about the magic of InstaLOD," says Mitch Harvey, 3D innovation manager at Deckers Brands. "We can now entirely avoid that bottleneck and freely utilise our CAD assets for any output downstream."

PIONEERING VFX

As one of China's leading VFX studios, Fontre Technology serves enterprise clients and consumers from around the world. One of the studio's key offerings is the production of 3D car configurators for Tier 1 OEM clients. This typically involves repairing and recreating the CAD data supplied by the automotive client, in a process that spans multiple weeks and requires several operators and modellers.

Fontre Technology first came into contact with InstaLOD at an industry event. Realising that this technology could be a revolution for their entire internal production process, they reached out to InstaLOD. Within hours of deploying the software, the studio was able to perform tasks that previously took several days with just a few clicks. Despite the studio only using a fraction of the technology at their disposal, the cost-savings have been dramatic and plans have been put

"PRODUCING LODs FOR ALL THE ASSETS IN THE GAME MANUALLY WOULD TAKE MANY MONTHS ON A JOB THAT NO-ONE WANTS TO DO. INSTALOD REMOVED THIS COST AND EFFORT"

James Answer, lead technical artist, Sony London Studio

into place to deepen the integration of InstaLOD in their production process.

InstaLOD has also become part of the fabric of Rotor Studios' work, and without it the rapid development of their WebGL technology would have been impossible. The studio has saved iteration time on assets by accelerating the process of combining meshes, thereby reducing draw calls. In turn, this has allowed Rotor Studios to develop far more photorealistic CG.

The solution proved painless to integrate into Rotor Studios' content pipeline, development tools and content creation software. Various parameters can be defined and set before leaving the program to run its course, without any need to follow up. While the technology has been vital for Rotor Studios' WebGL, it has proven especially useful across the entirety of the company's development and the post-production undertakings.

NEW REALITY

Blood & Truth is an explosive thriller game developed exclusively for PlayStation VR. The player becomes an action hero against

the glamour and grit of modern-day London. It is the highly anticipated spiritual successor to the London Heist segment of *PlayStation VR Worlds*, developed by Sony London Studio.

Creating an ambitious realistic world running at 60 frames per second, in two eyes with a wide field of view, and at greater than HD resolution is one of the key challenges that London Studio faced on the project. The detailed environments required a huge leap in the number of assets to develop, so finding the right optimisation solution was critical.

InstaLOD's well-designed Autodesk Maya integration and command line tools meant that initial tests were easy to produce. Despite using an early-access release initially, London Studio was impressed with the robust toolset and how InstaLOD quickly resolved any issues.

COST AND TIME SAVINGS

Performance is critical at all stages of a VR title. The ease of integrating InstaLOD into their Maya pipeline meant that Sony London Studio could quickly produce a



Left: This image was rendered with the new hardware-accelerated ray tracing featured in the upcoming version of InstaLOD Studio XL. The new ray-tracing engine leverages AMD's new Radeon™ ProRender technology and combined with InstaLOD's standalone application, enables novel workflows and direct image generation for any kind of source data: from engineering data to game assets

series of LODs for any given asset with one click. They could then distribute the tools to their outsource partners with ease. LODs could be generated in a number of seconds without having to maintain a distributed build system, helping with iteration times and meaning that performance could be maintained throughout the process.

Objects needed to have a level of detail flexible enough for the player to inspect them close up, but also work to populate richly detailed areas with low-cost versions at a distance. It was vital to switch between polygon topologies and shader complexity depending on distance. This worked

perfectly with InstaLOD's remeshing and texture-baking functionality.

Meshes could be collapsed from a number of materials down to one, and could bake down complex blended materials into simple textures and vertex colours. The high quality of the meshes meant that the poly count could be reduced quickly, vital for a game in which high frame rates are critical. Skinned and animated meshes also benefited from InstaLOD's ability to preserve deformations, which made it possible to adjust skinning on NPCs and let InstaLOD regenerate the new LODs. This helped to maintain the silhouette of enemies at

a distance with much lower-cost meshes, while still allowing high levels of detail during close combat.

James Answer, lead technical artist at Sony London Studio, adds: "Producing LODs for all the assets in the game manually would take many months on a job that no-one wants to do. InstaLOD removed this cost and effort, and made it possible to validate the team's performance budgets throughout."

From VFX to video games, product design to post-production, InstaLOD's versatile features provide much-needed relief to various different pain points in the production process.

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Get weekly news, reviews, tips & inspiration
Out every Tuesday



A screenshot of the ImagineFX newsletter. At the top, it says 'Workshops'. Below that is a large image of a cartoon landscape with a wooden cabin and trees. The text 'In depth Cartoon fur' is at the top right. Below the image, there's a section titled 'MASTER YETI TO CREATE CARTOON FUR' by Roman Lavine. It includes a profile picture of Roman Lavine and two small screenshots of a 3D software interface. The text explains the process of creating woolly cartoon characters using Maya, Yeti, Renderman (O3DE), and Nuke. It also mentions a 'Prepare the terrain' step and a 'Create the surface and unwrap UVs' step.

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS **ImagineFX**

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



This issue:

100 Traditional art FXPosé
Explore this month's selection of the finest traditional art, which has been sent in by you!

**104 Workshop:
From ceramics to Netflix**
Anna Sokolova takes her artistic cues from Delft Blue earthenware to paint a scene based on the sci-fi film *Annihilation*.

**110 Core Skills:
Drawing techniques**
Timothy Von Rueden continues his series on drawing techniques by covering shading methods and how to execute them.

**114 First Impressions:
Chie Yoshii**
Creating the "eternal moment" is key to this artist's approach.



FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Ellie Yong

LOCATION: Malaysia MEDIA: Pencil, watercolours WEB: www.artstation.com/sillyjellie

Ellie doesn't want to accept the harsh realities of the world. Instead, she immerses herself in her mermaid world, and may be drowning under too much work.



1 MASK

"This was my entry for the final day of 2017's Inktober. It was exhausting taking part - more than it should have been."

2 THE GREAT WAVE

"I took my inspiration from the poet Dennis Spilchuk ('Frothed in rage the tempest would not relent, incensed that they take without recompense') and The Great Wave Off Kanagawa by Hokusai."

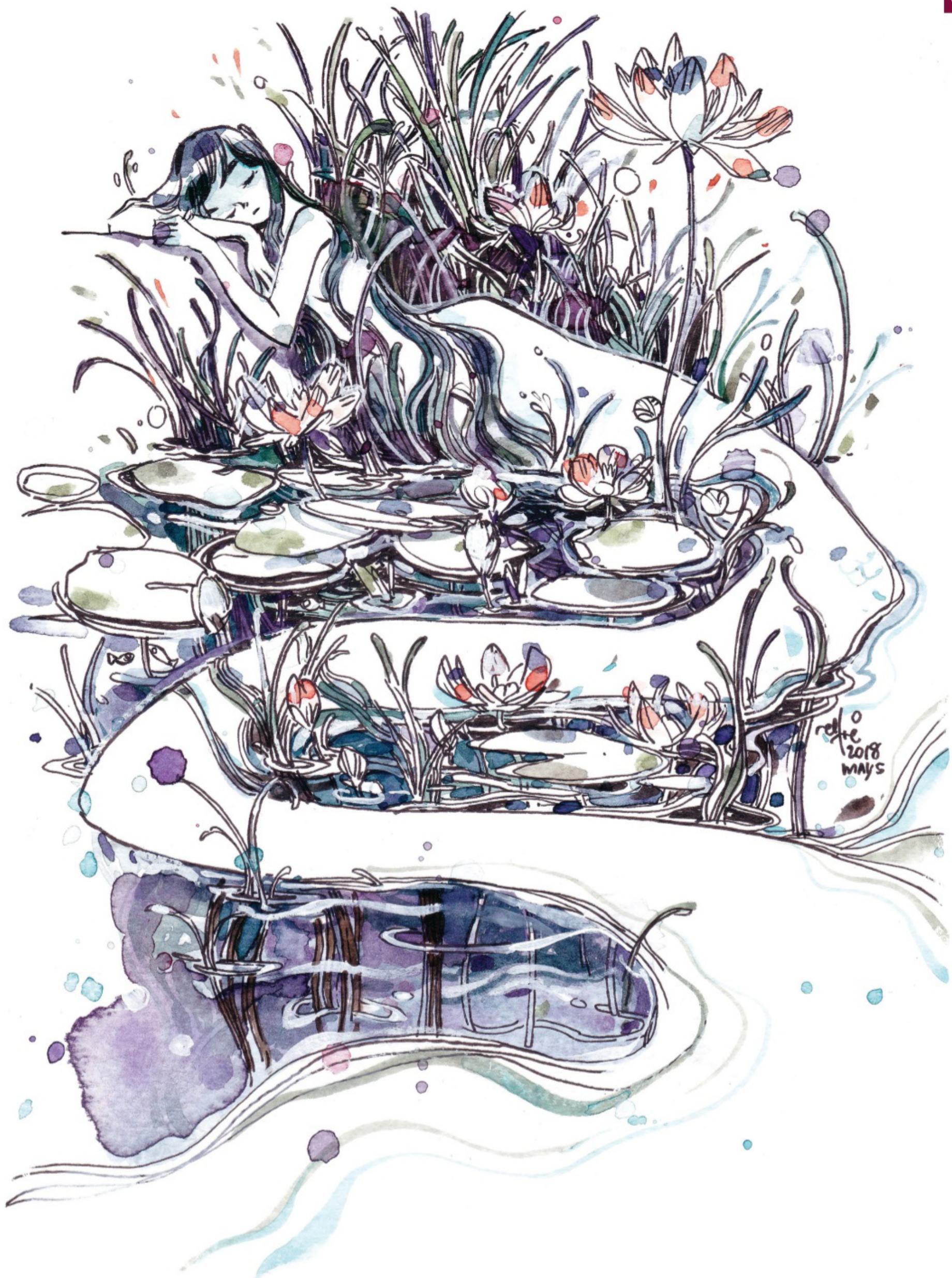
3 WATERMELON

"A fun little piece inspired by the colour of watermelons and the colours I had at hand."

4 RIVER

"Here, I was trying to capture the feeling of sleepy Sunday afternoons."







Natalia Pierandrei

LOCATION: Italy MEDIA: Markers, watercolour, pencils, pastels WEB: www.girlwithflaxenhair.com

Natalia is a freelance illustrator who tells us that her work "is mainly anime-styled but also inspired by fairy tales, Art Nouveau, European graphic novels with a penchant for Gothic imagery, and classical fantasy themes."



1 A ROMANCE OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

"Many of my early illustrations contain references to the Victorian Age or Steampunk."



3 A TALE OF WATER AND MAGIC

"An ink and watercolour piece created for the Art of Aqualumina project from 2016."

4 A DAY IN VENICE

"This was just an experiment with colours using inks and watercolour, that turned out rather well in the end."



Traditional Artist Workshop





**GET YOUR
RESOURCES**
See page 8 now!



Pencil

Watercolour

FROM CERAMICS TO NETFLIX

ANNA SOKOLOVA takes her artistic cues from Delft Blue earthenware to paint a scene based on the sci-fi film *Annihilation*

When Netflix reached out to me to suggest working on this fantastic project for its Amsterdam headquarters, I couldn't believe it. I was given full artistic freedom to create 25 murals based on Netflix Original series and films, with one condition: all heroes and iconic imagery should be recognisable with unique personalities and dramatic interest.

The finished artworks are presented as large tiles in the Delft Blue style. This is a traditional Dutch tin-glazed earthenware, a form of faience famous for its cobalt blue colours. Inspired by the 17th century Delftware installation in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, the tiles are mounted on the deep blue wall, hinting at the traditional Royal palace decorations.

In this workshop, we'll explore this fascinating technique and learn how to create impressive and dramatic

artwork using only one colour. We'll create a painting based on the Netflix sci-fi horror film *Annihilation*, itself based on the novel by Jeff VanderMeer. The story follows a group of scientists who enter The Shimmer, a mysterious quarantined zone of mutating plants and animals.

REAL-WORLD INSPIRATION

Because I work in mixed media techniques, I try to gather inspiration from the real world as much as possible. I have a tiny (but comprehensive!) library at home filled with different references. I also regularly visit Museum Island in Berlin and read sci-fi books. For this project, apart from traditional Delftware imagery, I researched Georgia O'Keeffe's juxtapositional art and Chinese enamel paintings.

The initial stages are always the most important for me. If I take my time during the planning phase then the result is much more satisfying.

We'll start with a composition based on letter shapes and see how dramatic film imagery of morphed plants, deer, skulls and a mutating alligator can be introduced into the scene. However, the focus should always be on the main characters. The golden rule of composition for me is "All roads (or lines in our case) lead to Rome".

We'll then use lines, washes and a dry brush technique to lead the viewer's eye and support the feel and atmosphere of the film.

I hope you'll find this workshop helpful and enjoy painting with me! And of course, become inspired to read more sci-fi books by Bradbury, Asimov and Vonnegut.



Anna is an award-winning freelance illustrator, teacher and artist based in Berlin. She's inspired by merging the traditional and innovative approach in arts and loves teaching. Discover more of her work at www.annasokolova.eu.

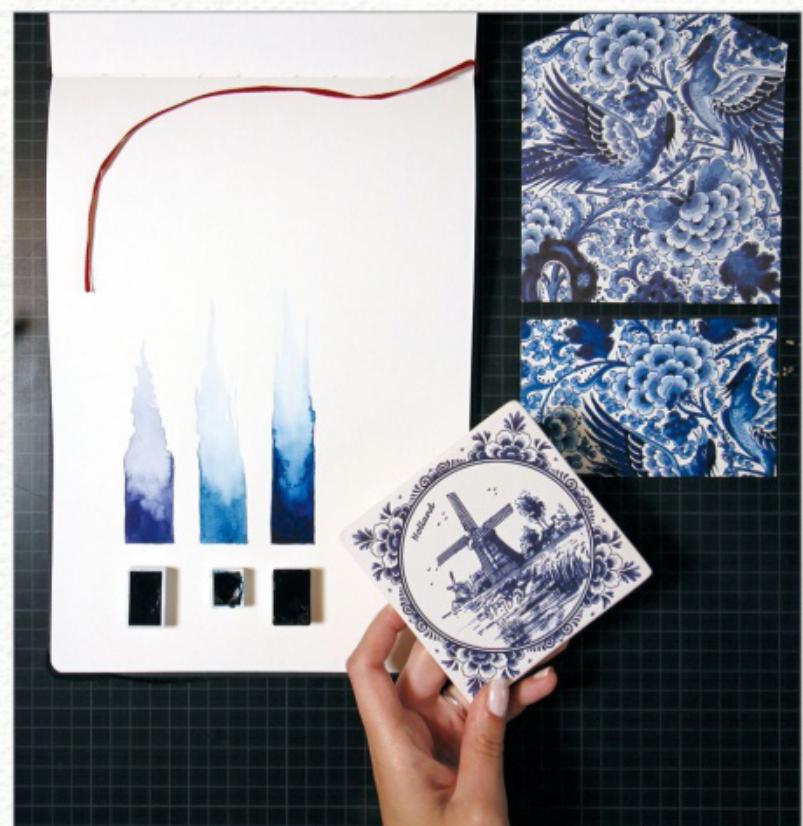


Traditional Artist Workshop



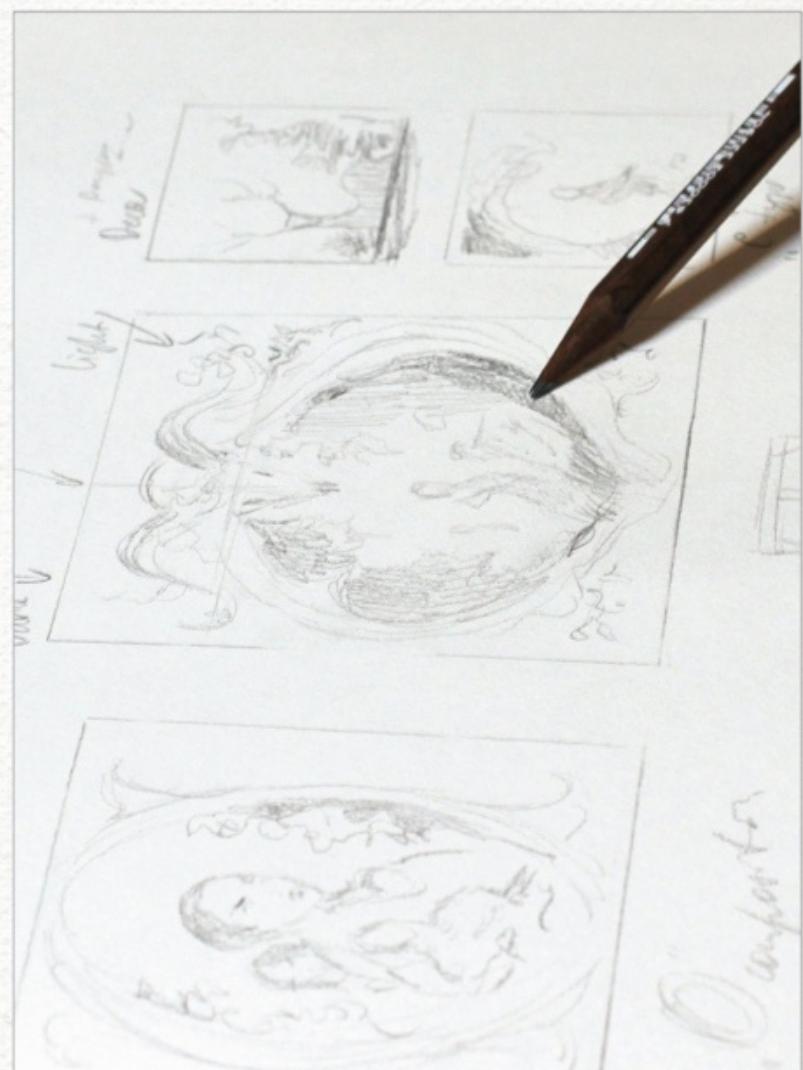
1 Inspiration research

This phase is crucial for developing the idea. I love to combine different sources when creating a unique take on a particular theme. In addition to traditional Delft blue motifs, I'm gathering inspiration from Georgia O'Keeffe paintings, Japanese enamel vase art and a book on the history of ornaments.



2 Choosing the most accurate colour

Bearing in mind the post-production process, I want to choose colours that will be close to my initial vision. I try several blues from different manufacturers made from the same pigment under the generic name of "iron blue". Then I choose one that's light-fast and adaptable, for creating moody darks and intense accents.



3 Preparing the materials

I need to set everything ready up-front, so there are no distractions during the painting process. I make sure the paint is prepared, the pencils are sharpened, and the flat brush within easy reach. I'm very excited to start creating!

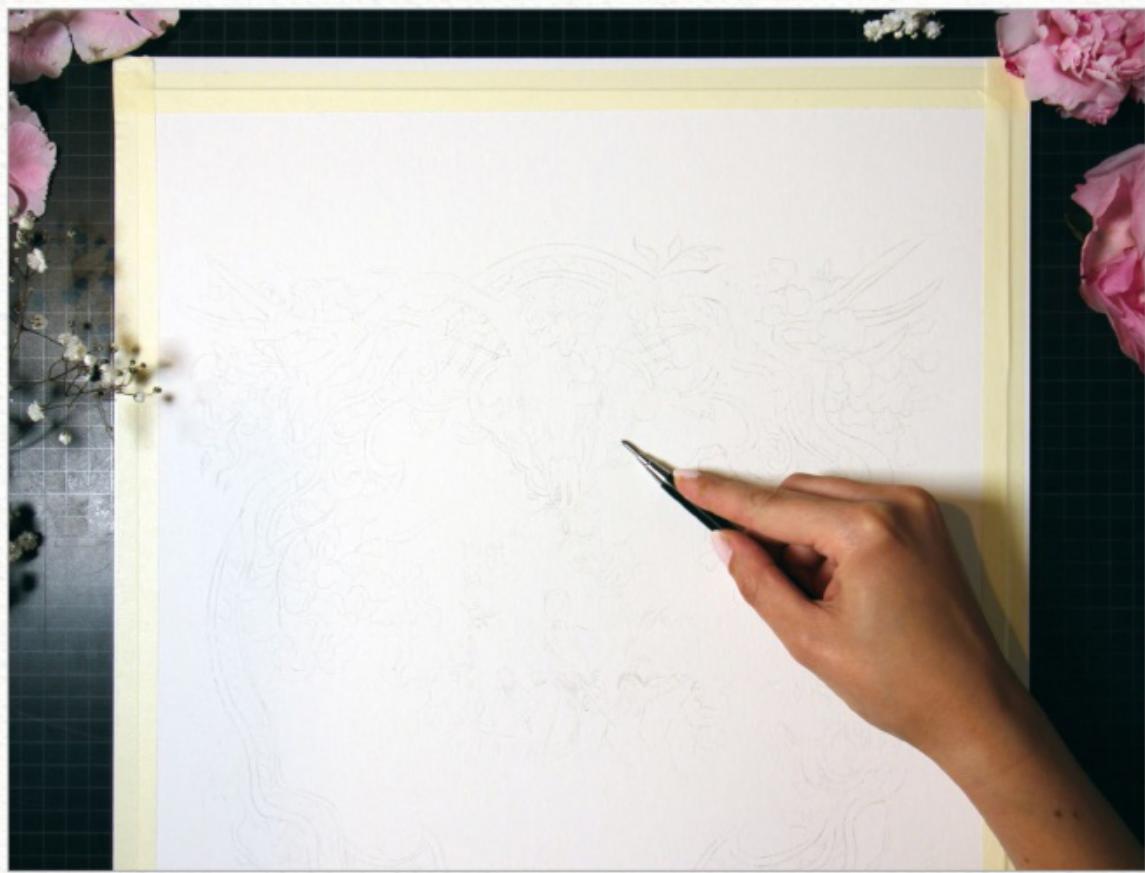
4 Composition sketches

I'm wondering how to focus attention on the main characters and still preserve the mysterious sci-fi feel of the piece. I try letter-based composition arrangements: T, O and C. Some ideas also include morphing deer, the mutating alligator and other highlights of the film.



5 Warm-up exercises

I do these before starting every painting session. Delft blue is based on ornamental decorative art, and I'm using its basic elements to train my hand. To achieve the variability of the line, I hold the brush completely vertically.



6 Refining the sketch

I sketch the final version on watercolour paper, which is secured to the polymer panel by light paper tape. I prefer drawing a comprehensive, detailed sketch for this decorative style. Using a small ruler helps me to draw straight lines when I'm tired or my hands are shaky.



7 Painting the outlines

I start painting the lines, beginning with what I think are the minor parts of the artwork. Sometimes it's scary to start, even after warming-up! Rotating the panel helps me to find the most comfortable angles and positions for my hand.



8 Supporting the straight lines

I've learned this trick from a vintage art book. To paint a straight line with a brush, I use a small ruler as "rails" and glide my hand along it while the tip of the brush slightly touches the paper. ➤

MATERIALS

PAPER

- 100 per cent cotton paper, Expression Hahnemühle, matt, cold pressed, 300gsm

BRUSHES

- Mop ("French") brush no. 2
- Rounded watercolour brushes no. 0, 1, 2
- Japanese brush medium
- Flat brush no. 40

WATERCOLOUR PAINT

- St. Petersburg White
- Night Prussian blue
- Schmincke Horadam Delft blue
- Schmincke Horadam Prussian blue

TEMPERA PAINT

- Caran d'Ache white

MASKING FLUID

- Schmincke drawing gum, neutral

PENCILS

- Mechanical pencil Ecobra 2.0
- Caran D'Ache Swiss wood HB

ERASERS

- Boesner kneaded eraser
- Caran D'Ache Technik technical eraser

SHARPENERS

- KUM Long Point sharpener
- Sandpaper block

Traditional Artist Workshop



9 Time for a masking fluid

I put a small amount of drawing gum on the areas that need to be protected, such as the main characters and the highlights on the skull. Make sure you're not using your favourite working brush for the fluid, and clean it off quickly.



10 Wet-on-wet technique

Using a flat brush, I cover the inner part of the frame with clear water and wait a few seconds until it's ready. Using a mop and flat brushes, I lay down the dark-valued intense paint, avoiding the focal area. I change the angle of the paper surface relative to the light source, and if it appears matt then it's time to paint.



11 Adding details using a dry brush technique

I add dark tree branches and leaves to the arrangement while the surface is still slightly wet. Next, I create textures and interest with a dry brush technique. My approach is to blot most of the paint on a paper towel, then flatten the point of the brush so that several lines can be drawn at once. This enables me to quickly creates masses of texture within the composition.



12 Time for white tempera

I start defining the smallest details and edges with white paint and a rounded watercolour brush. I use a dry brush technique with white to emphasise masses of light. Highlighted lines, borders and character details help to convey the intrinsic beauty of the painting's design.



13 Enhancing the dark values

I'm aiming for a dramatic composition filled with personality, and need to add a few more dark layers around the focal point and darken the shadows on the main character. I use a Japanese brush and mop brush because they hold more paint.



14 Final touches

Adding touches of white tempera on the dark, moody blue areas boosts the emotional aspect of the scene. Because the characters are in "The Shimmer", I'm avoiding sharp details and edges. It's helpful to step away from a painting for a while, drink some coffee and return with fresh eyes to add the final few strokes.



15 Wrapping up and preparing for the tiling stage

I now scan the piece into Photoshop in several stages at 600dpi resolution, then combine the files to prepare for the 54x54 fabrication size. I take the opportunity to add small details, correct mistakes and clean up the artwork before sending it for further production. The brightness and contrast are enhanced by five per cent. The artwork is then transferred on to customised tiles by a specialised atelier to accompany the other 24 titles of this series.

Core skills: Part 2

GET TO GRIPS WITH PENCIL SHADING

TIMOTHY VON RUEDEN continues his series on drawing techniques by covering a range of shading methods and how to execute them

earning how to produce good shading results will only be truly achieved from regular practice. This is because different pencils create marks that are noticeably different from one another, and so understanding which pencil does what is extremely important.

I used HB mechanical pencils for a long time when I changed my focus from digital to traditional art. However, once I started working with regular pencils, there was a clear

execution difference that I wasn't able to produce with mechanical pencils alone. Since then I've discovered techniques on how to produce different textures, tones and results that I combine to create my pieces.

It wasn't just the different HB hardness pencils that showed me the clear difference, such as shading with a 4B versus a 4H. I learnt that the tip of the pencil also gave vastly different results. For example, a more rounded tip gave a larger, softer result and was more efficient to work with.

MATERIALS

- PENCILS**
 - HB 0.2mm Orenz yellow mechanical pencil
 - General Kimberly traditional pencils
- ERASERS**
 - MONO Zero eraser
 - Kneaded eraser
- SURFACE**
 - Strathmore Mixed Media Paper

So while my best advice to learn shading is to go out and practice with multiple pencils and explore different methods, in this article I'll share my insight to help clarify this learning process. My goal is to inspire you to try shading with intent and create drawings by employing a range of shading techniques.



Timothy is an independent artist showing and selling his work at various conventions across the United States. See more of his art at www.vonnart.net.

1 Choose your pencils carefully

I recommend having a few solid pencils at hand that you can use in your work with full knowledge on the results they'll produce. There's a noticeable difference when working with different pencils on the HB scale and how sharp or dull the tip is. Test and see how some will produce dark texture while others create consistent mid-tone smoothness.

Having a duller-tipped pencil will produce larger areas while shading. They'll also create more of a textured look the higher you go up the B scale.



Going higher on the H scale will produce lighter yet smoother, buttery looking results.



4H



HB

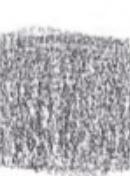
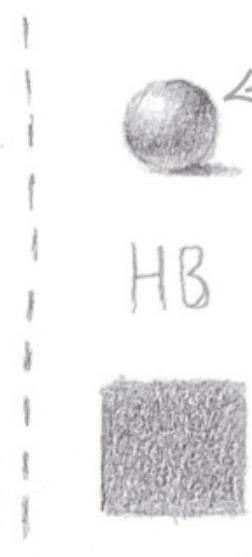


6B

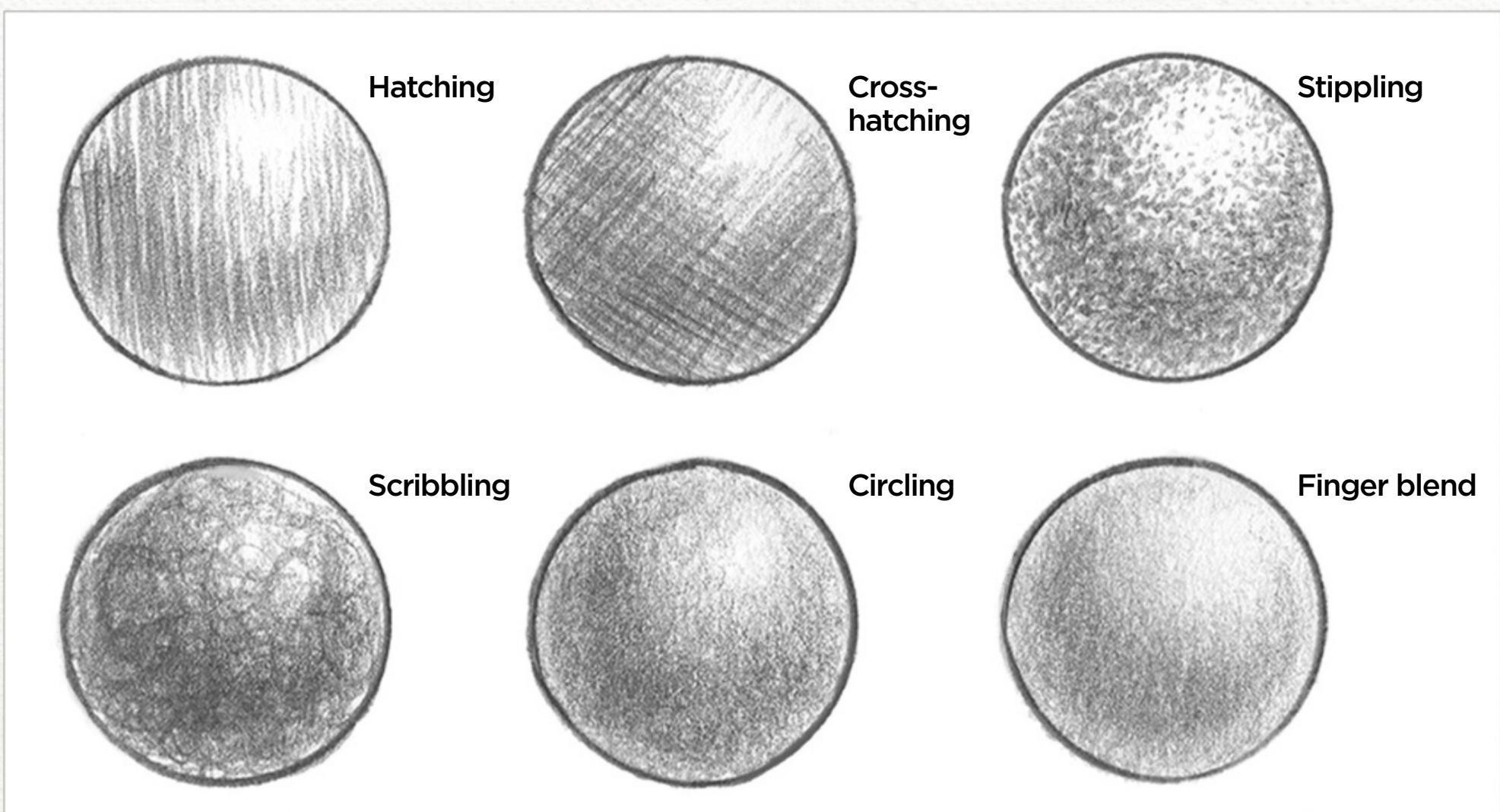


HB

Using a small tip mechanical pencil will create precision, but often will smooth out the paper texture when shading to create a more matte look.

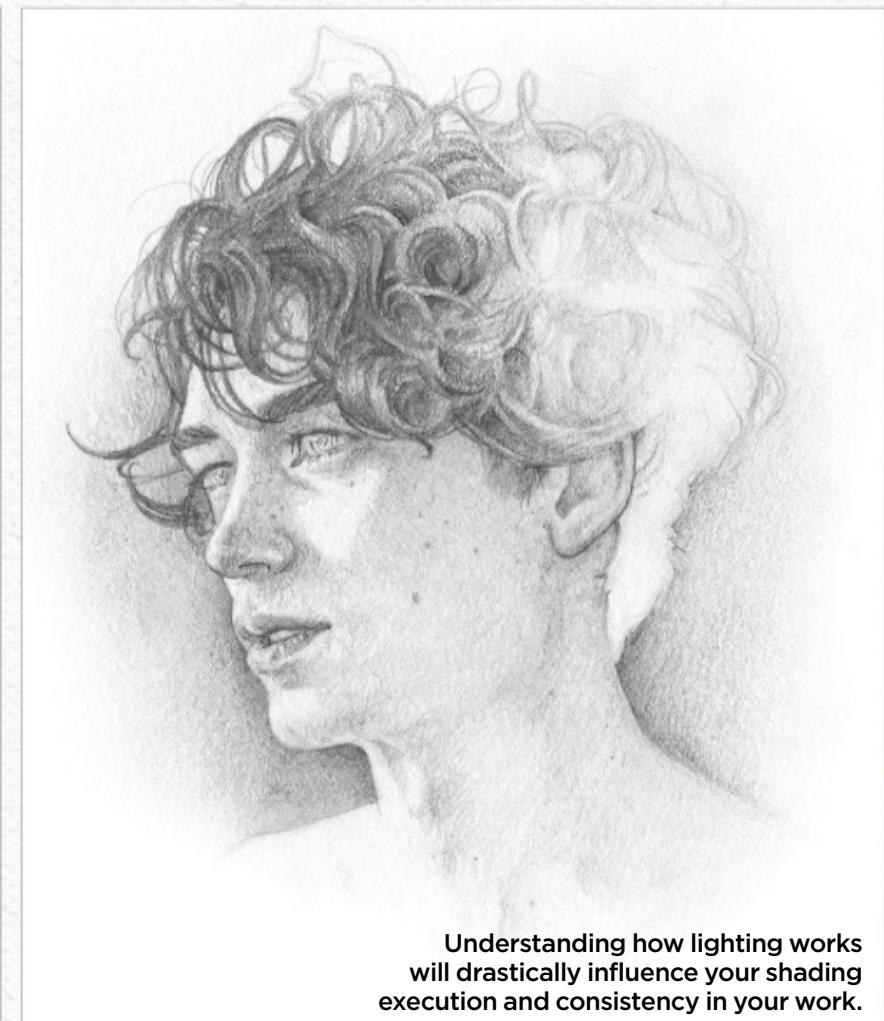
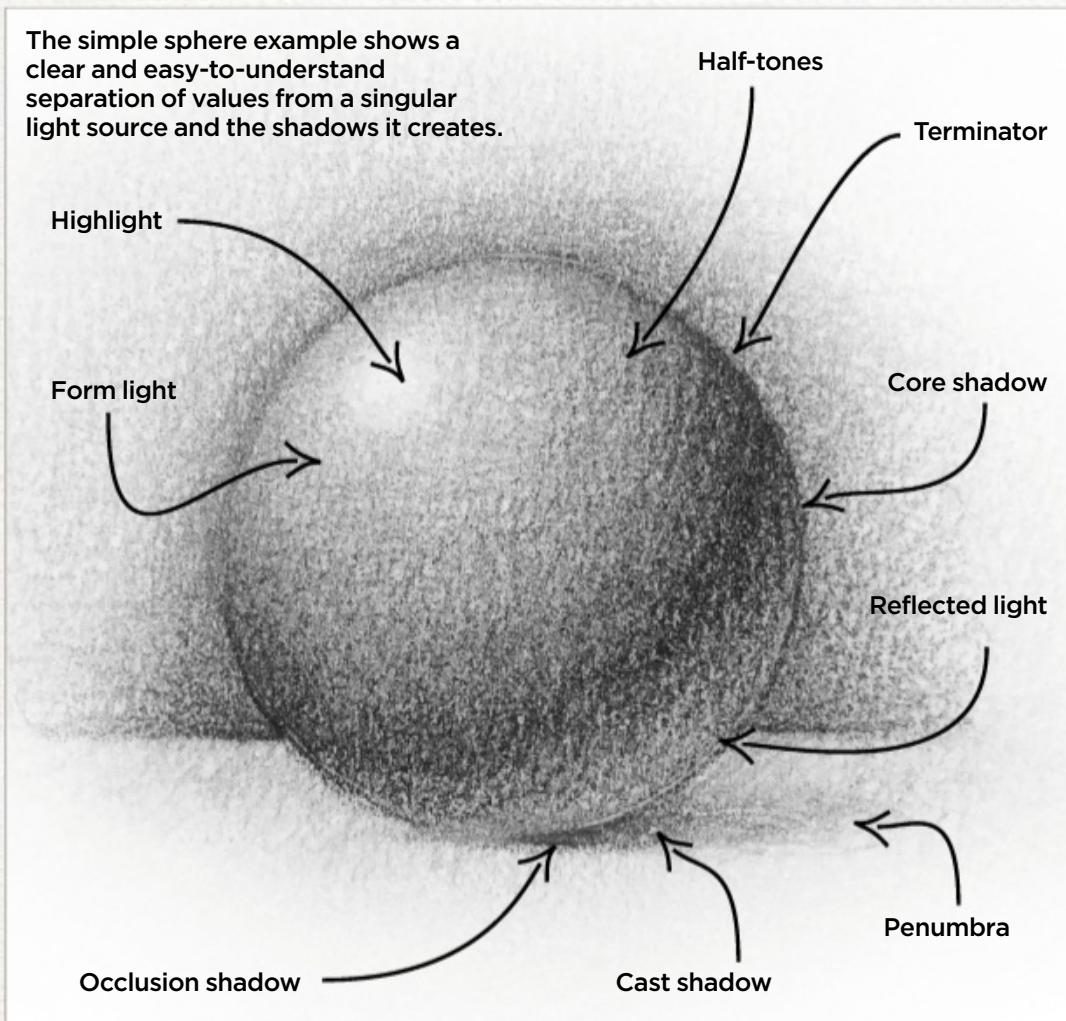


Core Skills Drawing techniques



2 Creating different types of shading

Every artist will find the shading method that works best for them and I tend to use a few while drawing. I primarily work with circling, but I've experimented with all of these methods and more to help me create my best results. Each method produces a distinct result and depending on what type of art you want to create, you'll want to find which is best for you! Hatching and stippling often create an underlying presence of texture and roughness. Circling and using a blending stump creates clean, gradual smoothness.

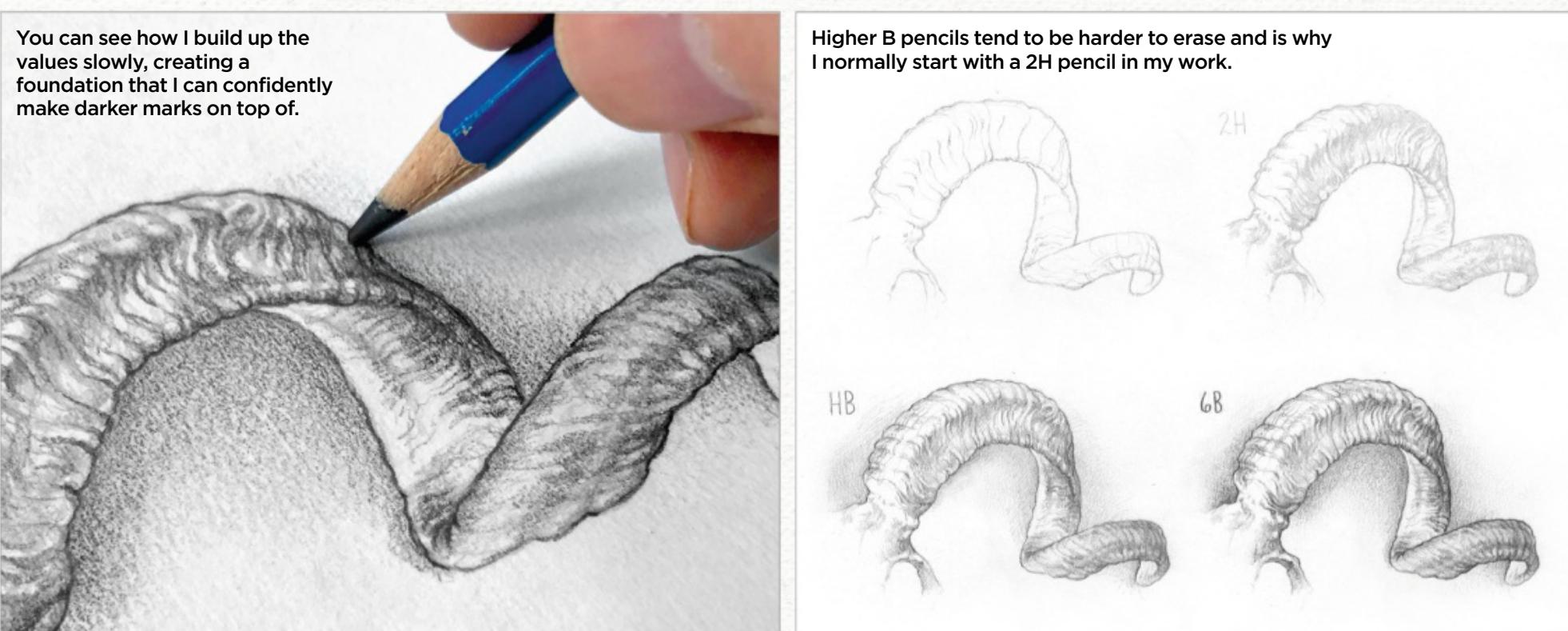


Understanding how lighting works will drastically influence your shading execution and consistency in your work.

3 Get to know your values when shading

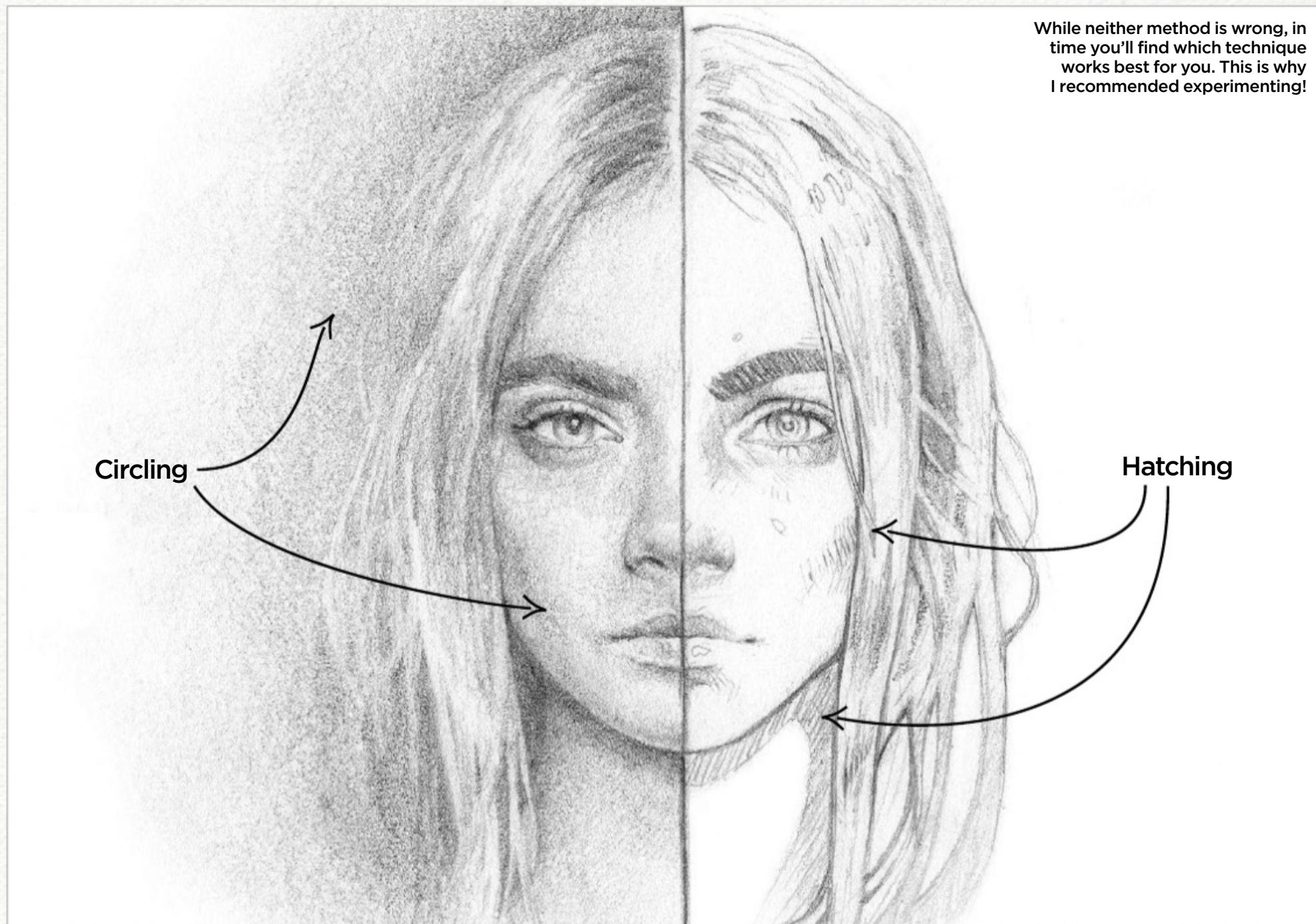
Take the time to understand how lighting works and the values it creates to shade properly. Do studies, find references and resources that provide this insight, and then apply that knowledge in your practice pieces. There's a range of value to work with, not just dark and light. ➔

Traditional Artist Workshops



4 Practice helps to provides insight

Now that I've been working with a handful of pencils with each drawing, I know when to switch over to another for a particular result. It's traditional and effective to start with a lighter H pencil and then gradually work darker into the B scale, to punch out the values and contrast.



5 Discover which shading techniques suits your style

Here's an example of two different types of shading methods. The left half has a softer realism finish with gradations on the paper texture done with a circling method and a slow build-up of value. The right half was done primarily with hatching and creates a crisp bold finish.

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First Impressions

Creating the “eternal moment” is key to this artist’s approach to her work



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?

I grew up in a small town called Kochi in Japan. We lived near the mountains and the ocean, surrounded by nature, animals and insects. I think it shows in my paintings.

You’re a child, you see a painting that changes everything. Where are you and what are you looking at? Nothing stands out in my childhood. The painting that changed everything for me was Caravaggio’s The Inspiration of Saint Matthew, in Rome’s Church of St. Louis of the French. I saw the painting in my early 20s, and it transported me to somewhere eternal. It taught me how powerful a painting can be, and was etched into my mind.

Now, what I try to achieve every day is to create an “eternal moment” of beauty. I heard the expression “eternal moment” in an interview with Joseph Campbell. Not only that an act of painting is like capturing a moment and making it eternal, but

Chie Yoshii



ANOTHER FACE

"This painting is about the layered depth of human personality, depicted by a mask of a fox that's said to change its appearance freely."

“It takes so long to create an oil painting that sometimes I miss the spontaneity”

PASSING TIME

"Cherry blossoms and the adolescent figure are short-lived, symbolising the ephemeral nature of life."



also that the truth often lies in between contradictions. I gradually start seeing my paintings as a way to visualise just that.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years? I’ve developed all my painting techniques from a figurative painter, Adrian Gottlieb. He was taught his painting techniques in Florence, and I was fortunate to be able to learn traditional techniques from him in Los Angeles.

What was your next step in art? Did other interests vie for attention? Each painting is a new challenge for me. I want to make the process more smooth and natural, but I also think that, for me, it will always be a struggle each time. I’d like to do

more drawings and try acrylics, because with them I can create things quickly and I will be able to be more spontaneous. I love the result of oil paintings, but it takes so long to create an oil painting that sometimes I miss the spontaneity.

Can you describe the place where you usually create your art?

The idea comes when I least expect it, for example when I’m taking a bath or when I’m about to fall asleep. I sketch in bed or on the couch, and refine and paint them in my studio.

What are your painting rituals?

I sketch small, then I usually do a lot of researching, gathering information and visual references. Once I have a pretty good idea of what I want to paint, I ask my model to come in to do a photo shoot. With the photos, I create a detailed sketch, then transfer the drawing to canvas or panel to paint.

Tell us about your first paid commissioned piece

My mentor and teacher from college commissioned me to paint his wife for her birthday gift. She’s a violinist, and he’s a graphic designer, so I painted her with her violin, and overlayed his geometric design.

Is your art evolving? What’s the most recent experiment you made?

My concept and technique are quite consistent, but last year I painted young girls for the first time for a group show. It was very interesting. It opened up new possibilities for my future subjects.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way? You won’t know until you try.

Chie's oil paintings explore psychological themes with a contrasting mix of traditional techniques and modern style. They're inspired by the relationship between human psychology and mythical archetypes. See more at www.chieyoshii.com.

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